

Woody Allen's *Cassandra's Dream* (2007) as a contemporary Greek Tragedy¹

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Abstract: Unlike *Crimes and Misdemeanors* or *Match Point*, which approached similar themes, *Cassandra's Dream* by Woody Allen (2007) had no good reviews. However, according to the author of this article, for those who analyse this screenplay from the perspective of the legacy of Greek tragedy in Western culture, its merits should not be underestimated. The frequent references to Greek tragedy, either titles or characters, prove that the American director wants to present *Cassandra's Dream* as a contemporary instance of Greek tragedy, and contemporary men and women as victims of an almost almighty and mocking tragic irony. The author's aim is also to show the evident similarities of this screenplay to *Match Point* and, above all, to *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, the matrix screenplay for the three films.

Key words: classical tradition, Greek Tragedy, cinema, *Cassandra's Dream*, Woody Allen.

“Life is a Greek Tragedy” is the subject about which we have gathered today in Athens on the ninth and tenth February 2009. We approach, then, the ancient Greece from the perspective of the Classical Tradition, thus paying homage to tragedy, a literary genre which is more than two thousand years old, a real mankind's patrimony, both the origin and the centuries-old inspiration for one of the most brilliant chapters of Western Literature. We are certainly indebted to the Greeks for having conceived the model for a suitable expression and visualization of the sometimes tragic nature, even essentially tragic nature, of human life.³ Woody Allen,⁴ for his part, in spite of being admired as one of the undeniable masters of contemporary cinematographic comedy,⁵ has also made some remarkable incursions into tragedy, often in search of a classical ethical paradigm as a clear counter-line of argument against both a frequent contemporary unscrupulousness and ethical indifference.⁶ In his opinion, our lives are quite often tragic and, even more important, if we want them to reach an acceptable degree of dignity, they should attain or at least approach to the tragic proportions of the Greek models. Our lives, to sum up, should be Greek tragedies rather than avoid this possibility.

¹ This article was published in Catalan in *FAVENTIA* 31/1-2, 2009, 279-293.

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³ Although this is not a contribution on the Greek tragedy but on its tradition in a very general sense, see e. g. as an introduction: Gregory 2005; Wiles 2000, 1997; Easterling 1997; Csapo-Slater 1995; Longo 1990 and Baldry 1973.

⁴ For a general introduction and also the influence of his personal biography in his creativity, see e. g.: Lax 2007; Blake 2005; Luque 2005; Fonte 2002; Schwartz 2000; Bailey 2000; Baxter 1998; Girlanda 1995; Björkman 1995; Girgus 1993; Lax 1992; Brode 1992; Spignesi 1991; Flashner 1988; Sinyard 1987 and Bendazzi 1987.

⁵ See e. g.: Hösle 2007; Wernblad 1992; Yacovar 1991; Green 1991; Bermel 1982 and Lax 1977.

⁶ Regarding the so called “serious films” of W. Allen, see e. g.: Valens 2005; Conard 2004; Sander 1997; Downing 1997; Blake 1995; Roche 1995; and Vipond 1991.

Indeed, in *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989),⁷ one of the so called Allen's serious films and, from my point of view, the matrix screenplay for the later ones *Match Point* and *Cassandra's Dream*, he demanded not to turn any tragic paradigm –Oedipus in that case- into an emblem of comedy by adding time to it both simply and unethically. The film tells us the story of a man responsible for a murder finally attributed to another 'drifter who has several other murders to his credit', while the instigator and the real hired murderer are not punished. Even worse, the former succeeds in suffocating his early strong feelings of remorse after a relatively short period of time and a relaxing vacation accompanied by his family. He proves thus that one "can actually live with that on the conscience"⁸ as well as that God's eyes do not see men's sins and villainies. He does not even think, unlike others in the film, that, in the absence of God, he should follow the ethical paradigm of tragedy, that is to say, he should assume the responsibility for his acts whatever the consequences derived from such a decision.⁹

In *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995),¹⁰ Allen takes advantage once more of tragedy, because the tale of Lenny Weinrib (Woody Allen), which he has decided to write, is "a tale as Greek and timeless as fate itself". However, on this occasion and by means of a good example of what one could call "positive tragic irony", everything turns out well; the sad masks of tragedy give way to the cheerful ones of comedy; an opportune and kind *deus ex machina* undoes the tragic knot and, finally, a truly peculiar chorus demands our smile by singing and dancing as the most effective way to expel from human life all kind of shady storms.

Nevertheless, *Mighty Aphrodite* meant a brief parenthesis of joy in the course of the interesting Allen's relationship to tragedy, since *Melinda & Melinda* (2004),¹¹ where the American director theorizes on comedy and tragedy by judging them in an apparently impartial way, becomes on the contrary an indisputable thesis, that is: moments of humour do exist in men and women's lives; comic playwrights exploit them, but they exist within a tragic overall framework; the essence of life is not comic, it is tragic, so that "we laugh because it masks our real terror about mortality". Therefore, if in *Mighty Aphrodite* W. Allen had almost convinced us that masks are in fact an absurd adherence to our faces that should be turned round, he seems now to regret that earlier boldness by maintaining that human laughs mask an underlying tragedy which is inherent in our condition.

Match Point (2005),¹² shows in my opinion both a true and tragic hopelessness and, on this occasion, Allen chose the tragic poet Sophocles as the suitable reference: "Sophocles said: 'To never have been born may be the greatest boon of all' ".¹³ This is certainly a terrible sentence said by a young man, Chris (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), who has not only planned but also executed a triple murder, including the baby that his lover Nola was expecting, that is, his son. He acts in this awful way simply because he wants to preserve his excellent social and financial position, which he is not going to renounce and was attained with the help of Fortune. Consequently, here is another unpunished criminal since a junkie with a long string of convictions is accused of

⁷ Allen, W. *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. Written and directed by Woody Allen. MGM, DVD. All the quotations correspond to this edition.

⁸ Forming a clear contrast, needless to say, with *Crime & Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky.

⁹ For a detailed analysis, see e. g.: Gilabert 2006, 183-198.

¹⁰ Allen, W. *Mighty Aphrodite*. Written and directed by Woody Allen. DVD, Lauren Films.

¹¹ Allen, W. *Melinda & Melinda*. Written and directed by Woody Allen. DVD, Twentieth Century Fox. All the quotations will correspond to this edition.

¹² Allen, W. *Match Point*. Written and directed by Woody Allen. DVD, Warner Brothers. All the quotations will correspond to this edition.

¹³ Compare it with *Oedipus at Colonus* 1224-27: "Μὴ φῦναι ἅπαντα νι / κᾶ λόγον. τὸ δ', ἐπει φανῆ, / βῆναι κεισ' ὀποθεν περ ἦ / κει πολὺ δεύτερον ὡς τάχιστα" ("Not to be born at all / Is best, far best that can be fall, / Next best, when born, with least delay / To trace the backward way" -translated by Storr 1968).

Chris's murders, while he has learnt to push the guilt under the rug.¹⁴ It is quite obvious, then, that Sophocles is not already quoted here –like in *Crimes and Misdemeanors*- as part of an ethical paradigm that may save our contemporary Western world from values which have run aground. Instead he is quoted as if to say that having no scruples and no ethics is not only condoned by ancient wisdom but often rewarded by success. In other words, Chris's life is certainly not a Greek tragedy because, unlike the tragic hero he will never become, he refuses to assume both the inevitable and painful atonement of his acts.

Whatever the case and after this brief and indispensable look at Allen's evolution with regard to tragedy,¹⁵ I open the analysis of *Cassandra's Dream* (2007),¹⁶ which is the main aim of this article. On this occasion, unlike *Crimes and Misdemeanors* or *Match Point*, Allen's film had no good reviews, probably because, leaving aside other strictly cinematographic considerations, he approaches, already for the third time, the unpunished crimes, at least regarding to its instigator, uncle Howard (Tom Wilkinson), and not to its two executors, brothers Terry (Collin Farrell) and Ian (Ewan McGregor). Nevertheless, for those who analyse this screenplay from the perspective of the legacy of Greek tragedy in Western culture, its merits in my opinion should not be underestimated. Indeed, never before was it so evident Allen's desire –or even necessity- to see human life as the performance of a Greek tragedy, and its characters as the victims of an almighty and mocking Tragic Irony. Many are the essential features of Greek tragedy which can be discovered in this screenplay, and we should mention above all human beings' awareness of the limit, the act of *hýbris* (ὑβρις) which is committed when they surpass it, the *anagnōrisis* (ἀναγνώρισις) or discovery of the proportion of human errors, and the unavoidable duty of the atonement. It is even likely that Allen corrects or exorcises that absolute hopelessness of *Match Point* by modelling a character like Terry, who still believes that the ethical paradigms derived from concepts like "God" and "Greek Tragedy" –a tragedy he does not know but Allen does very well- are truly alive as both reasonable and valid references.

Allen opts this time for presenting human life as a tragic voyage,¹⁷ as clearly shown by the ironic contrast between the first sequence, where we see brothers Ian and Terry looking forward

¹⁴ Once again forming a clear contrast with *Crime & Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, a book that Chris reads at the beginning of the film.

¹⁵ For an accurate analysis of *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, *Mighty Aphrodite*, *Melinda & Melinda* and *Match Point* with regard to the legacy of Greek tragedy in them, see e. g.: Gilabert 2009.

¹⁶ Allen, W. *Cassandra's Dream*. Written and directed by Woody Allen. DVD, Divisa Home Video. All the quotations will correspond to this edition.

¹⁷ In Greek Literature the references to the ups and downs of the "Ship of State" are certainly frequent (see, e. g.: Archil. frs. 105, 106 West; Alc. fr. 326 Lobel-Page; Thgn. 680 West; A. Th. 2-3, 62-64, 758, 795; S. *Ant.* 163-4, 190; E. uripides, *Supp.* 269; etc.). Given that, in *Cassandra's Dream*, Allen creates characters who, in the course of his personal voyage, go beyond the limit, I propose to remember now those Menelaus's reflections in S. *Aj.* 1073-1087: "οὐ γάρ ποτ' ἄν ἐν πόλει νόμοι καλῶς / φέροιντ' ἄν, ἔνθα μὴ καθεστήκοι δέος, / οὐτ' ἄν στρατός γε σωφρόνως ἄρχοιτ' ἔτι, / μηδὲν φόβου πρόβλημα μηδ' αἰδοῦς ἔχων. / ἀλλ' ἄνδρα χηρή, κὰν σῶμα γεννήσῃ μέγα, / δοκεῖν πεσεῖν ἄν ἀπὸ σμικροῦ κακοῦ. / δέος γὰρ ᾧ πρόσεστιν αἰσχύνῃ θ' ὁμοῦ, / σωτηρίαν ἔχοντα τόνδ' ἐπίστασο· / ὅπου δ' ὑβρίζειν δρᾶν θ' ἂ βούλεται παρή, / ταύτην νόμιζε τὴν πόλιν χρόνῳ ποτὲ / ἐξ οὐρίων δραμοῦσαν ἐς βυθὸν πεσεῖν. / ἀλλ' ἐστάτω μοι καὶ δέος τι καίριον, / καὶ μὴ δοκῶμεν δρῶντες ἄν ἠδῶμεθα / οὐκ ἀντιτείσεν αὖθις ἄν λυπῶμεθα. / ἔρπει παραλλάξ ταῦτα" ("The laws of a city can never function well where no one is afraid, nor can an army be sensibly controlled, when it has not the protection of fear and respect. Even if a man has a mighty frame, he must remember that he can be brought down even by small mischief. Know that when a man feels fear and shame, then he is safe! But where he can be insolent and do as he pleases, believe that the city, though at first it has sailed along easily, will in time sink to the bottom! Let some terror be established where it is needed, and let us not suppose that if we act according to our pleasure we shall not in time pay for our actions with our pain. These things come by turns" -translated by Lloyd Jones 2001). See also: Palomar 1998, 45-61.

to buying a sailboat, and the last one when their corpses are taken out of it. Life is, then, a tragedy, and whether Greek or not it will depend on the satisfaction of several requirements.

Let us begin with a minor one. It is absolutely logical, for instance, to give a name to the sailboat before standing out to sea, but the scriptwriter decides to turn this act into the clear premonition of a future tragic event. The chosen name is “Cassandra’s Dream”, “that was the 60-to-1 shot” Terry hit, “a lucky name”, he says firmly convinced. However, bearing in mind that it is also the name of the most famous soothsayer of disasters in Antiquity, the tragedy or final *katastrophé* (καταστροφή) is guaranteed. This is not the only classic or Greek premonition, because Ian’s father, Brian (John Benfield), thinks that his son is too much ambitious since he envies the luxurious life of his uncle Howard, “always waiting for his ship to come in”, though, “like the poet said: ‘the only ship certain to come in has black sails’”. Therefore, this Theseus, absent-minded because of his ambition, will forget or will not know how to change the sail of his *hýbris* (ὑβρις) for the one of his prudence and, in his turn, Brian-Aegeus will not throw himself over a cliff but he will receive from the sea the most tragic gift: the corpses of his two sons. Nevertheless, Antiquity and contemporary life walk together in this film, so that Allen will also give us a present example of premonition, since Ian and Terry stand out to sea with their girlfriends and they all sing joyfully a song about harmony and “the way to go home”. “Ain’t life grand?”, they ask rhetorically, and Terry cannot help remembering that these words come from a film, *Bonnie & Clyde*, whose end is truly tragic.

Life may certainly be a tragic voyage and sailing around the Greek islands, in its turn, has been traditionally dangerous. Allen decides that one of the fellows of Ian’s girlfriend, Angela (Hayley Atwell), tells the story of the shipwreck of two literary geniuses in the middle of the ocean, although, fortunately, they are rescued alive ‘*in their life jackets sipping martinis*’. Angela will confess then to Ian that she has always wanted to sail around the Greek islands and she is confident that some day he will be her captain, but obviously she does not know that this idealized voyage will never take place, while the last voyage of the man with whom she is in love will end, so to speak, in a Greek tragic atonement of an also Greek earlier act of *hýbris* (ὑβρις). Angela will thus check to what extent she was mistaken when she agreed with Ian that human beings should make their fates rather than be their victims: I: “I think we make our own fate”. A: “Yeah, I think we make our fate too”. As an actress, she even thought that the play in which Ian saw her acting was “a very moral play”, thus rejecting at the same time “all that stuff about life being a tragic experience”, but Ian’s final tragedy, dictated by Fate or made by him by consciously going beyond the limit, will correct her severely.

This is completely logical if one takes into account that, in a party given by one of her fellows who says to be a fan of Greek tragedies, she also assures that she loves them, that she is “crazy about them”, though “it’s just rare that I could ever get the chance to act in one”. They both agree that their favourite tragedy is *Medea* by Euripides, and Angela adds that Clytemnestra is “probably the best character of all classical plays”. Ian is also asked with regard to his preferences, but his answer, undoubtedly a hardly pondered one, is: “I’m not really that familiar”. Needless to say, the ironic game Allen is playing throughout this sequence is really masterly. Indeed, it is worth noticing that Angela, an actress, is playing now a side role if compared with those played by the classic *Medea* or *Clytemnestra*, but she is acting in fact in a true Greek tragedy, while Ian, who is not familiar with theatre and has no classic references, is playing and will play unfortunately the main role in the same drama. This wide range of irony, moreover, does not end here but there is also the erudite quotation of Aristotle’s *Poetics* when Angela’s friend affirms:

I have to say, the best productions of Greek myths I’ve ever seen -better than anything you’ll find on the stage- was done in dance... I mean, all the terror was there, all the

*Aristotelian pity and fear.*¹⁸ *It's so much more visceral in dance, don't you think?. A: Right.*

Very probably the realism which is peculiar to the cinematographic language could in principle surpass the visceral nature of dance; the characters of this tragedy, *Cassandra's Dream*, will certainly know all the terror of a true tragic experience, and, with regard to the audience, it could and should appear in it all the Aristotelian pity and fear, that real *kátharsis* (κάθαρσις) which will make them be even more aware of the immoral essence of human greediness and, as a consequence, make them strengthen their rejection.

All began with the understandable Ian and Terry's desire to make a life of their own. Ian does not want to spend all his life working in his father's restaurant, while Terry often checks that the *katastrophé* or "turning upside down" (*katá, κατά*) of his sad circumstances takes the opposite way: "I was losing at first, and my luck changed... Ian, I won £30,000 last night... I can't tell you the feeling... It was like I stepped out of my body". Terry's thesis is that luck comes "in streaks" and, when it does come, you "gotta be willing to push your luck when it is hot". His brother, who dreams of taking part in a hotel business in California, also feels that it is now or never, that one must take advantage of real chances, because, if not, "you spend the rest of your life wondering what might have been". He counts, besides, on the example of his future father-in-law (David Horovitch), who, when Ian lets him know his Californian project, confesses that there was a time when he could have invested in some ventures, but he did not have the stomach for risk, so that he has spent his life "behind the wheel of a car driving other men".

Life means fight and conflict, and although human beings aim to go beyond all sorts of limits, they should always bear in mind, as the Greeks –the creators of tragedy- did, the probable and unexpected coming of the *katastrophé*. Terry will experience a first overturning of his earlier lucky state when, playing a card game, loses much more money than he got before. He believed that his luck would change but "*it only got worse*". The sequence conflict-solving the conflict follows its way and, given that Allen has imagined a tragic sailing, brothers Ian and Terry, in search of the money they need, will fall into the network of the unlimited greediness of his uncle Howard, who, as expected in a marine tragedy, says he is in '*unfamiliar waters*'. He confesses them that his prosperous present and better future depends on the murder of a human being: Martin Burns (Philip Davis). He asks them to kill him, and though it is quite evident that he is not Clytemnestra, nor is his greediness a sort of Iphigenia he must avenge, he does not hesitate to remind them that they are his "family" and that "blood is blood". He demands from them not to make questions, protect their own and, taking into account his generosity throughout the years, now "the help it should be automatic".

Ian and Terry are not ancient Greeks but contemporary British citizens born in the bosom of a family and a society where it is logical to think that, whatever the degree, "God and the Divine Justice" have been the references to think of when establishing the limits not to be surpassed. Terry is aware at least of the fifth commandment: "He wants us to kill him... I don't want to kill anybody". 'I can't do it, Ian... I'm not as cool as you". On the contrary, he casts several doubts on God, but all seems to show that he has got an underlying *timor Dei* with the help of which he must counteract his brother's demands. Indeed, Ian asks him not to turn his back on what he knows in his heart to be true –did he even become an atheist?- simply because he is facing a

¹⁸ Compare it with what Arist. *Po.* 6.1449b: "ἔστιν οὖν τραγωδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας μέγεθος ἐχούσης... δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι' ἀπαγγελίας, δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαινούσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν" ("Tragedy is, then, a representation of an action that is heroic and complete and of certain magnitude... it represents men in action and does not use narrative, and through pity and fear it effects relief to these and similar emotions" -translated by Fyfe 1965). See also: Cano 1999.

difficult task: T: “What if there’s a God, Ian? I mean, what if... all those nights we used to lay awake, you know, in the dark... and curse the fate of every human soul... what if he was too angry?”.

No, Ian and Terry are not Greek, but Allen endows them with the awareness of the limit, and going beyond it implies both disobeying God’s law and committing a Greek act of *hýbris*, whose punishment corresponds to *Díkē* (Δίκη). Ian, when he still knows how to face his uncle, replies that family is family “but there are limits”. And Terry knows, besides, that if they do it “there’s no turning back”, that “there’s a line I can’t cross, but we are crossing the line here” and, therefore, “there is no tomorrow”. Things have turned out so tragic because Terry needs to be out of debts and Ian wants his uncle to finance his projects; even worse, he feels now like in a dream and, as Terry before, thinks he has got the winning hand, so that he has decided to push his luck.

Just at the beginning of this article I proposed to regard *Crimes and Misdemeanors* as the matrix screenplay for *Match Point* and *Cassandra’s Dream*, and last Terry’s doubts before the crime would be the proof. “*Ian, it’s murder*”, and Ian replies with what is too often a terrible truth, that is to say: if they were in the army, they would kill “to profit men who’re up to here in corruption” and, moreover, “most killings go unsolved”. And then he adds: “the real world is not what you watch on the television”, which in my opinion is the adapted translation into the new script of Judah’s words (Martin Landau) to that naive Clifford (Woody Allen) in *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, who still believes in the assumption of personal responsibilities: “But that’s fiction”, says Judah, “That’s movies. You see too many movies. I’m talkin’ about reality. I mean, if you want a happy ending, you should go see a Hollywood movie”.

The murder of Martin Burns is shot with the sense of decency which is peculiar to Greek tragedies, thus not showing the blood. Allen seems to bear in mind the thesis of Antiphon, the sophist, according to whom: “δικαιοσύνη οὖν τὰ τῆς πόλεως νόμιμα, ἐν ἧ ἂν πολιτεύηται τις, μὴ παραβαίνειν. χρῶντ’ ἂν οὖν ἄνθρωπος μάλιστα ἑαυτῶι συμφερόντως δικαιοσύνη, εἰ μετὰ μὲν μαρτύρων τοὺς νόμους μεγάλους ἄγοι, μονοῦμενος δὲ μαρτύρων τὰ τῆς φύσεως· τὰ μὲν γὰρ τῶν νόμων ἐπίθετα, τὰ δὲ τῆς φύσεως ἀναγκαῖα· καὶ τὰ μὲν τῶν νόμων ὁμολογηθέντα οὐ φύντ’ ἐστίν, τὰ δὲ τῆς φύσεως φύντα οὐχ ὁμολογηθέντα (Col. 1) τὰ οὖν νόμιμα παραβαίνων εἰὰν λάθῃ τοὺς ὁμολογήσαντας καὶ αἰσχύνῃς καὶ ζημίας ἀπήλλακται... νενομοθέτηται γὰρ ἐπὶ τε τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς” (Col. 2)¹⁹ (“justice lies in not transgressing the provisions of the law in the city where one lives as a citizen. So, a man will practise justice for his own benefit if, in front of witnesses, he obeys the laws, but when no one can be cited as a witness of his actions, he obeys Nature’s orders. Indeed, while legal provisions have been imposed, Nature’s ones are unavoidable: the legal provisions are the result of an agreement, they are not innate, while Nature’s ones are innate, and are not the result of any agreement” (Col. 1). So, if when transgressing the provisions of the law, one is not observed by those who have come to the agreement, he will be free from shame and punishment... laws have been adopted for the eyes”—the translation is mine). Indeed, uncle Howard did want no witnesses and also counted on the help of time. The murder had to be “quick, simple, no witnesses. And then just let it fade into history”. If there are no witnesses, there is no murder: I: “No one saw us. And we did the right thing. We didn’t run back to the car”. And Angela, who reads the newspaper, confirms their expectations: “That guy that you were speaking to at the wrap party was murdered”. I: “Who?”. A: “Martin Burns... no one saw or heard anything”.

On the other hand, there is no better way to emphasize Terry’s *anagnórisis* than to see him adopting his brother’s thesis: I: “Now is now. And we’ve done it and it’s over. And it’s always now...”. T: “You’re right, Ian. It’s now. It’s always now”. Even uncle Howard hastens to contribute to Terry’s new and apparently strong faith: “The worst is behind you. I’m here to tell

¹⁹ Fragment A 44; ed. *Diels-Kranz* 1960 (Oxirrincus XI n. 1364 ed. H(unt). Col. 1 (1-33 H.) i Col. 2 (34-36 H).

you that the future is rosy”. However, the *anagnōrīsis* finally arrives and that “now” becomes an awful present deprived of future and past:

We'll never be our old selves again... There's no going back... We did a terrible thing, Ian... We stepped on him like he was an insect... I want to turn myself in... We broke God's law... I want this off my neck... This is my personal decision... I've thought about suicide... I just want to tell someone. Go in and serve my punishment... I wish you could come with me. But if you won't, I understand... I feel less panic since I made this decision.

This is precisely the decision demanded by Clifford in *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, when he wanted the criminal to surrender to police, because “*then, you see, your story assumes tragic proportions*”. Indeed, “in the absence of God, he is forced to assume that responsibility himself. Then you have tragedy”. In this case, it is not in the absence of God but in his rediscovered presence that Terry assumes his responsibility, but it is certainly now when his story assumes tragic proportions or, in other words, his life has also become in fact a Greek tragedy.

Due to these new circumstances, uncle Howard gives up believing that “family is family” and “blood is blood”. Ian has informed him about his brother’s decision and, needless to say, being the instigator of the crime, only wants ‘*to survive*’. In Greek tragedies, their characters, whether aware or not of their limit, they succumb to their fate inevitably, but uncle Howard and his greediness were born to fight against and finally win any fate: “He has to be stopped before he this whole thing unravels. I: ‘Yeah, I can’t let that happen’... H: ‘Speed is of the essence. Terry could be doing something awful while we sit here and curse our fate... It has to be made to look like an accident... an accident or a suicide’”. It is just now when Ian also experiences his *anagnōrīsis* because he sees quite clearly he has crossed the forbidden line: “He –Terry- was right about one thing. It was like crossing a line. There was no way back”. This *anagnōrīsis* and Terry’s previous one are not really an *ékplēxis* (ἐκπληξίς), since they have not arrived like an unexpected hit. Terry failed to observe the fifth commandment, that is, that God’s law he learnt when he was a child. Ian mocks at his brother’s naive *timor Dei*: “God?...What God, you idiot”. Whatever the case, they both knew they were going beyond the human limit and, like many other characters in Greek tragedies, one could say that they fell into an act of *hýbris*. Nevertheless, if Greeks had already believed that it was impossible to push the capricious and unmanageable Fortune, willing to deviate the course of Fate is at any rate a crazy pretentiousness.

Here is, then, Terry’s sharp diagnosis: “It’s sad how things turned out... We made the wrong decision”. I: “The way I see it, we didn’t have much choice”. T: “You always have choice”. The alternative choice was to see how Burns’ testimony put uncle Howard in prison for the rest of his life, so that he assumed his responsibility and attained the tragic proportion that Terry, for his part, does not avoid: “I called the police last night... I told them I had information on the murder of Martin Burns... I wanted to tell them who I was, but I didn’t... I’m gonna call them as soon as I get back”.

Like the Greek sophists’ skill at setting up *phýsis* (φύσις) in opposition to *nómos* (νόμος), Ian asks his brother, then, not to forget the undeniable violent nature of human life: “You think we’ve committed some kind of unnatural act, but we haven’t. The whole of human life is about violence. It’s a cruel world... You’re just shaken up because you’ve come face-to-face with your own human nature”. It is quite evident that, from these ethical parameters, assuming the tragic heroism which is peculiar to any atonement is both unthinkable and absurd: I: “We made the wrong choice... but being punished by it won’t undo it... What’s the matter with you? It’s suicide”. However, Terry rejects this immoral sophisticated proposal and wants to come back to the order of things: “It’s the order of things, Ian... Can’t you see it? I have to straighten it out”. Atonement is, therefore, the only way forward to be followed. The laws of Greek tragedy prescribe it, although quite obviously the “order of things” is a concept ambiguous enough to be

understood from the Greek perspective or from the one of any human being from whom, like in Terry, the fear of God has not disappeared completely. And, in this respect, it is worth remembering now that Ben (Sam Waterston), the rabbi in *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, explains in this way to the sceptical Judah his trust in a very similar “order or moral structure of things”:

B: It's a fundamental difference in the way we view the world. You see it as harsh and empty of values and pitiless, and I couldn't go on living if I didn't feel it with all my heart a moral structure, with real meaning and forgiveness, and some kind of higher power. Otherwise there's no basis to know how to live.

Time has arrived for the end of the tragedy. Uncle Howard had already warned that Terry's death had to seem an accident or a suicide. Ian confirms that the ethical castle where his bother lives now cannot be assailed. He has decided to sacrifice him; he has poured the tranquilizers that will neutralize him into the beer Terry is going to drink. But Ian breaks finally the bottle, becomes terribly angry and fights against his brother. Terry pushes him in his turn and Ian's fall turns out to be fatal. Afterwards: Terry's despair and his suicide. Both a shared and tragic Fate has won over them: T: “Ian, what's wrong?”. I: “... You've ruined everything!”. T: “Ian, stop!”. I: “We could've had everything!”. T: “Ian, Ian! Oh God! God!”.

But, what about uncle Howard, the instigator of the murder of Martin Burns? Will he be beset by terrible feelings of remorse? In the absence of God –Whom he never mentions-, will he follow the ethical paradigm of tragedy, thus assuming his responsibility and atoning for Burns and his nephews' death? Or, quite on the contrary, will he leave aside the ethics derived from God and Greek tragedy and he will see unmoved the unbearable pain of his sister and brother-in law? Will he even expect that, with the help of time and far from the dangers that beset him, he will recover his earlier luxurious and comfortable life? To sum up, another unpunished criminal? Woody Allen seems to opt now for opening a wide range of possibilities and not for limiting them, though he might be exorcising in my opinion -or simply correcting, at least with regard to Terry as character- the hopelessness that one detects in *Crimes and Misdemeanors* & *Match Point*. On this occasion, then, there are different hypothesis or questions to be answered by the audience.²⁰

Whatever the case and paying homage once more to Greek tragedy, Allen shows in *Cassandra's Dream* his well-known skill at creating one of the most essential features of this literary genre: the tragic irony.²¹ Indeed, here are several examples -leaving aside the above mentioned ones-: α) Ian and Terry remember that happy summer in Ireland when uncle Howard bought them a boat, and now, some years later, they are keen on buying a sailboat. After buying it, Ian even says: “Best thing we ever did, getting this boat, Terry, isn't it?”. But it is precisely in this sailboat where they will die tragically and where their corpses will be found; β) the first time they stand out to sea with their girlfriends, they joyfully sing a song that says: “Wherever I may roam / Through land or sea or foam / Oh, nice harmony / You will always hear me singing this song: / Show me the way to go home”. But time will come very soon when this nice harmony

²⁰ However, with regard to Allen's point of view on personal responsibility as shown in films such as *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, *Match Point* or *Cassandra's Dream*, see e. g.: Lax 2007, chapter 2, “The screenplay”.

²¹ Greek audiences had foreknowledge of the plots of the tragedies and, therefore, there was little suspense. The “dramatic irony” took place when the characters' words and actions had one meaning for them and both a different and contrasted one for the audience, as in γ and ϵ –in this case for Ian and Terry, too. But the rest of the examples could be assigned to the so called “situational irony”, that is, when things do not turn out as planned or expected; in other words, “life's ironies”. See e. g: Kirkwood 1994; Knox 1983; Vellacott 1975; Lavandier 2005 and Colebrook 2004.

will disappear and their tragic death will prevent them from going home; γ) Ian & Terry see Martin Burns having his breakfast in a restaurant in order to memorize his face. They have already decided to kill him, so that they notice the irony of this fact: T: “That poor bastard. Eatin’ his breakfast. He has no idea his days are numbered”; δ) one of the Angela’s friends tells her that Carol has had an accident while driving drunk. Very probably “she didn’t much care if she made it back to town or not” –a suicide?-, but Angela maintains that she doesn’t care; in fact, she would have been happy if it had been fatal. But her friend says then: “It might be yet...”, so that Angela comments: “It’s funny how life boils down to this. Life is nothing if not totally ironic”; ε) Burns speaks to Ian and Terry on the occasion of a party where they all happen to meet. He tells them that his mother is already 91 years old and that he hopes he has her genes to grow very old. But he is speaking to those who will shorten his life and, therefore, the verbal expression of his hope is both as useless as ironic; θ) Angela’s father thinks that his daughter “could have had the pick of any man”, so that he is happy to see she has chosen Ian, a business man, and not “some starving actor in the theatre”. But, ironically, falling in love with a starving actor would have set her free from living Ian’s tragic death; η) Ian takes his brother to a horse-race in order to make up his mind. Terry gets a winner and Ian says that he is firmly convinced “*it’s the beginning of a new streak*” and Terry can feel it, too. But there will not be any streak but a tragic and sudden end; ι) intending once more to convince Terry not to surrender to police, Ian propose to stand out together to sea. Both Kate (Sally Hawkins) and Angela think it is a wonderful idea, and Angela even adds: “I love you. I think taking your boat out with your brother will do you just as much good as him”. But it will be the most tragic of sailings: death; and κ) Kate and Angela have gone shopping in quest of the clothes they think Ian and Terry will love most. But they are already dead and, therefore, Kate and Angela’s quest is as ironic as useless.

Cassandra’s Dream begins with the image of a sailboat full of the new owners’ dreams, and it ends with the image of the same sailboat and its fatal load: their corpses. The hypothesis of the policeman we see on the screen is that “one killed the other, either on purpose or by accident... and then took his own life, drowned himself”. And a bit later he says: “The place reeks of booze and pills. I don’t know. Every day, it’s something else”. And, in our turn we could add perfectly well: “Life is a Greek Tragedy”.

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