



## Between the Law and Desire: The Split Subject in Asghar Farhadi's *A Hero*

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**Abstract:** This paper explores Asghar Farhadi's film *A Hero* from a psychoanalytic standpoint. Using a Lacanian framework, I will argue that Farhadi depicts what Lacan defines as a split subject who is under the control of the Other. The Other particularly manifests through various forms of media that define and limit the subject's desire. The film highlights how the protagonist as the divided subject of desire moves from compliance to resistance in pursuing his desire. Such a radical movement, I will argue, takes place when the protagonist of the film reconsiders his relationship with the world around him. In his defiance of the logic of the Other and his realization that desire would not lead to an ultimate object of satisfaction, the protagonist learns how to be free even though he does not gain physical freedom.

**Keywords:** desire; Lacan; the Other; Farhadi; the unconscious; Iranian cinema



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# Between the Law and Desire: The Split Subject in Asghar Farhadi's *A Hero* Farzad Kolahjooei

## Asghar Farhadi's Cinema and Its Psychoanalytic Possibilities

Asghar Farhadi (b. 1972) is now a familiar name in the world cinema. He has received various prestigious awards including Best Narrative Feature of Tribeca Film Festival for *About Elly* (2009), Academy Award for Best International Feature Film for *A Separation* (2011) and *The Salesman* (2016), and the Grand Prix of the Cannes Film Festival for *A Hero* (2021). Farhadi's particular narrative style visible in most of his recent films has played a key role in making him a recognized name in today's cinema. While his narratives move in the direction of traditional films in that they provide linear action, they redefine the position of the spectators in watching the filmic image. In his linear narratives, Farhadi deliberately creates absence by hiding a key action that is pivotal to the spectators' understanding of the story, which might create suspense, similar to what we observe in traditional film, yet that hidden piece is never revealed. By doing so, he places the audience in the midst of tension, where every judgment on the characters' actions is suspended. The missing piece in Farhadi's films is a "an empty space" and "a lost signifier" (Rodríguez Serrano, 2020, p. 918) that raises important questions in the spectators' mind and puts them in a state of unease. The inherent relativism of Farhadi's cinema disrupts the spectators' grasp of truth

and places them in a world filled with tension. In the meantime, the open-ended narratives in Farhadi's films add another layer of relativism to the spectators' watching experience. Considering the fact that mystery and puzzle are the framing features of Farhadi's films, one might sense a point of rupture here. How could one make a puzzle film, but leaves it open-ended? A possible answer might be that he does not make mystery for mystery's sake; rather he wants to show the impact of the absent traumatic event on the subject's life, how the presence of an absent cause affects their psyche. Farhadi's films do not follow the structure of contemporary puzzle film which, among other things, includes "nonlinearity, time loops, and fragmented spatio-temporal reality" (Buckland, 2009, p. 6). However, similar to such atemporal films, his works display an embedded implicit sense of uncertainty and ambiguity which is particularly seen in the diverse points of view he provides through protagonists who are unreliable in narrating events. The ultimate focus of Farhadi's cinema is on the divided subject of desire and the way the spectators are supposed to make sense of the riddles they confront as the film moves forward.

Farhadi's cinema is known for its display of the impact of implicit social factors on the individual's life. He highlights how the individual human being undergoes critical traumatic experiences triggered by larger socio-economic problems. This paper sees how certain forms of the Lacanian Other affect every aspect of the character's life. I will argue that manifestations of the Other are at work everywhere in the film to affect the way the protagonist speaks and acts. The

prison, the charity organization, the local council and various forms of media are the major vehicles of the Other, which demand the subject to behave in a certain way. The film shows the gradual movement of the subject from purely obeying the Other to radically opposing its never-ending requests. The second important aspect that the film highlights is the hidden presence of the unconscious, in the form of a non-presentable sequence, which creates a gap in the spectators' understanding of the story. The film, then, turns into an artistic object that implies more than what it presents on the screen, as if a traumatic absence always threatens to resurface and affect the visible reality. Last but not least, the circularity of the action at the core of the film, which is emphasized at certain points, places the protagonist in a position of reconsidering his connection with the Other because it does not help as promised. Thus, even if there is satisfaction, it is only achieved through reconsideration and revision. The only way that the subject would achieve freedom is to realize the limitations of the Other.

### The Other and the Subject of Desire

The Lacanian Other (or the big Other) is the discourse that plays a crucial role when the subject enters the symbolic order, where he is introduced into the world of the law and language. Here, the signifiers stand for absent objects, and presence is only felt symbolically. The symbolic order is then where desire is born. Lacan extends his formulation of the subject's reality through

language to the unconscious. Since, for Lacan (1998), “*the unconscious is structured like a language*,” (p. 20) where the subject takes the rules for communication from an outside world, “*the unconscious is the discourse of the Other*” (p. 131). For Lacan (1998), the Other is “the locus of speech and, potentially, the locus of truth” (p. 129). The Other is not a neutral network of signifiers whose function is to facilitate speech. It is “the figure or figures of social authority, the one or ones whom the subject supposes to have authority—to desire” (McGowan, 2015, p. 27). The Other is an anonymous socio-cultural discourse that is in control of the subject’s uttermost desires.

Language is a construction from which the subject seeks the ultimate signifier; therefore, “*man’s desire is the desire of the Other*” (Lacan, 1998, p. 38). Due to the fact that our speech comes from an external source, we desire “from the point of view of another” (Evans, 1996, p. 39). A division takes place in the subject’s mind as he enters the symbolic order. He loses a significant part of his being in order to step into the realm of thinking. As Lacan (1998) further explains, the subject suffers from uncertainty “because he is divided by the effects of language” (p. 188). The subject of uncertainty “always realizes himself more in the Other” because “he is already pursuing there more than half of himself” (Lacan, 1998, p. 188). Such a pursuit is always fruitless, making the subject’s desire “ever more divided, pulverized, in the circumscribable metonymy of speech” (Lacan, 1998, p. 188). One might think that since “the subject is subject

only from being subjected to the field of the Other,” (Lacan, 1998, p. 188) he is stuck in a deadlock of desire. The Other seems an all-encompassing, ever-present entity that devours the subject without their knowledge: “the Other, latent or not, is, even beforehand, present in the subjective revelation. It is already there, when something has begun to yield itself from the unconscious” (Lacan, 1998, p. 130). The relationship between the subject and the Other takes place in the former’s unconscious.

In a blind relationship with the Other, the subject’s essential question is: “what does the Other want from me?” (Lacan, 2006, p. 693). The subject, then, wants to know the object of desire of the Other and, at the same time, to be the object of desire of the Other. That is why the subject must always be reminded that “*your desire is the desire of the Other*” (Lacan, 2006, p. 158). The more the subject obeys the Other, the more dissatisfied they would be, because there is no end to requests of the Other. It is only when the subject becomes aware that there is no Other to the Other, that behind the seemingly organized, flawless structure of the Other is nothing but the lack, that they could get a certain degree of freedom. The subject must come to the realization that they must unchain themselves because the Other is not such a powerful system as it might seem. The Other deceptively presents itself to the subject as a purposeful structure that leads to signification; thus, they must submit to its demands. For McGowan (2007), “the big Other sustains its hold over the

subject through the creation of a world of meaning: when one accepts the meaningfulness of this world, one subjects oneself to the big Other and its authority” (p. 16). What if this seemingly coherent symbolic order loses its significance through the intrusion of a more powerful entity? McGowan (2007) indicates that if the Real intervenes, then the Other loses its grasp over the subject: “the encounter with the traumatic real, which is an encounter with a point of non-sense within the big Other (what the big Other cannot render meaningful), frees the subject from its subjection” (pp. 16-17). The subject then knows that they could move on without always looking back to see what the Other wants from them.

Looking at Asghar Farhadi’s *A Hero* from such a perspective would be meaningful in a couple of ways. First, the protagonist of the film discovers the truth about his existence when he undergoes pain and suffering, which results from his acquiescence to the non-stop whims of the Other. He acquires this awareness when he realizes that satisfaction does not come from following the blind path of the Other’s desire, an “anonymous social authority” (McGowan, 2015, p. 31) that dictates to the subject unnatural desires that imprison them within the confines of the social order. Second, the spectators would also realize that while Farhadi’s film is deceptively straightforward, it puts them in a bitter state of uncertainty that might seem disappointing in providing a clear-cut access to the truth, yet it is fruitful because it would widen their scope through providing alternative ways to understand the moving image.

## The Silent Unconscious of the Film and the Deadlock of the Spectators

*A Hero* (2021) is not structurally complex. In a linear, straightforward plotline, Farhadi depicts a few days off prison of a debt prisoner, Rahim (Amir Jadidi), who desperately attempts to make an agreement with his creditor in order not to return to prison once his leave is over. He is hopeful that with a bag of coins his girlfriend has recently found in the street, he would be able to pay his debt. Later on, however, his moral conscience fills him with a sense of guilt, and he decides to return it to its real owner. When he returns to the prison, the warden finds out about his moral good, and arranges for the local TV and newspaper to spread the words about his decent action. He is promoted as a hero in the first half of the film, but is then rejected in the second half because people start to doubt his honesty. With almost everyone against him, Rahim returns to prison at the end of the film as he is unable to repay his debt.

The film raises doubts about the nature of truth and moral good, and ends without closure, leaving the spectators in a state of uncertainty, which comes from unanswered questions that pop up in their mind one after another. The film's structure is linear, yet it does not attempt to solve the puzzle(s) it has created in the mind of the spectators. *A Hero* places us in the present, and it rarely, if ever, deviates from its chronological movement, but the present is under the heavy shadow of the past, a past which is never clearly explained. There are a couple of important points



in the past that affect everything in the present: Rahim's relationship with his ex-wife, which is mentioned a few times but is not explored in detail, and the truth about the woman who is apparently the owner of the bag of coins. It is in the absence of Rahim's ex-wife and the bag owner that uncertainty spreads everywhere about the motivations of Rahim's actions.

Rahim's past life seems inaccessible to the spectators. Some of the characters mention his ex-wife's name and raise the spectators' curiosity about the reasons behind her separation from Rahim. We are not given a tiny hint about why she left Rahim and her son. Having access to such information would have helped us to unravel the mystery of Rahim's married life before imprisonment. However, the film's odd silence means that we are not allowed into its unconscious. The inherent rupture between the past and the present of the action of the film withholds information from the spectators' watchful eyes. The first time that Rahim's wife is mentioned in the film takes place by Bahram (Mohsen Tanabandeh) during a phone call with Hossein (Alireza Jahandideh). When Hossein, Rahim's brother-in-law, asks Bahram, Rahim's creditor, to do him a favor and agree to his release from prison, his cold answer opens up a hazy window to the past: "he let down his wife and child, so he doesn't deserve any favors" (00:13:16-00:13:20). Later on, Bahram tells one of the prison officials, Mr. Taheri (Farrokh Nourbakht), that he doubts everything Rahim says about the story of the bag of coins. He raises several questions two of which are of utmost importance about the whole film: "how do you know for sure that his account of the bag

isn't made up?" (00:40:41-00:40:45) and "why did his wife divorce him with a child?" (00:40:56-00:40:58). Nearly at the end of the film, the prison warden asks him directly why his wife left him, but he evades a clear answer: "the truth is that...we couldn't make it, we couldn't live together (01:11:29-01:11:37). Rahim's past has strong ties with his present, but is it almost absent from the world of the film. As the ending shows, it would definitely affect the future-to-come. The spectators are only occasionally told about Rahim's past life, and the key to part of the truth about Rahim's past remains hidden.

Within the visible world of the film, there is another aspect that remains unresolved. The woman who is apparently the owner of the bag of coins suddenly disappears and we never find out the truth behind her story. Her disappearance has a crucial role in the film because it triggers Rahim's downfall. Once her presence turns into a measure to prove Rahim's honesty, everyone attempts to find her, but she remains absent. The woman is another source of mystery for the people in the film and the spectators. Immediately after her disappearance, almost everyone becomes curious about her identity and whereabouts; however, none of the questions about her is answered. In the middle of the film, Rahim starts a quest-like search with the help of the taxi driver to find her, but his quest is futile. He eventually takes a picture with his phone from the jewelry store's security cameras where she went to sell the coins after she took them from Rahim's sister.

The picture shows only a glimpse of her face from the above, which makes her unidentifiable to anyone who might have known her. Then, when a presence turns into an immediate absence, it turns into an object of desire, which is never to be located. It is as if an important part of the truth becomes inaccessible forever, as it goes into the deepest layers of the unconscious without giving the characters within the film and the spectators any chance to locate it.

The puzzle that Farhadi creates in *A Hero* is a known strategy in Farhadi's cinema. In Farhadi's major films including *About Elly* (2009), *A Separation* (2011), *The Salesman* (2016), and *The Past* (2013), a certain part of the action is deliberately withheld from the spectators, which considerably affects their judgments and expectations. There is almost no clue to the truth veiled by such absence, which affects our understanding of the reality of the action. If the withheld scene functions as a stain in the filmic image, it is that which restricts access to the core of truth so that the spectators move in the usual direction of a classic plotline without being given the key to the problem. It is only through rearranging different pieces of the puzzle that they are able to get closer to the evading truth. Farhadi has indicated his view of the nature of truth as relative in a recent interview: "we cannot talk definitively about truth" since "even a really simple event can be fluid in character" and it would seem more meaningful if it is "reflected in different ways across time and place and in people's inner worlds" (Khoshbakht & Todd, 2023, p. 110). For Farhadi, truth is indefinite, multifaceted, and relative to every individual's internal experience. Because of such a

perspective, uncertainty and doubt function as key concepts in his films. Similar to the major recent films of Farhadi, *A Hero* hides pieces of action far from the view of the spectators, and it is as if such hidden pieces serve as a surplus that reappears elsewhere, returning the look with a gaze. This stain in the film recalls what Lacan (1998) indicates about the relationship between the artist and the spectator: “He gives something for the eye to feed on, but he invites the person to whom this picture is presented to lay down his gaze there as one lays down one’s weapons” (p. 101). The gaze of the artistic object is thus a point in the film that defies the spectators’ look.

### The Other’s Demands and the Subject’s Impasse

The underlying paradox in the Other is that it forms every part of our existence, yet it does not exist. In his definition of the concept of the Other, Slavoj Žižek (2010) regards it as that “thick symbolic texture of knowledge, expectations, [and] prejudices” that “continuously fills in the gaps in our perception” (p. 338). The Other is then an odd mixture that goes to the unconscious of the subject and forms their worldview. Implicit in such a view is that the Other functions as a mechanism of control over the subject’s life and desires. While it might seem that it is an overpowering entity, the Other is “fragile, insubstantial, [and] properly *virtual*” and it “exists only in so far as subjects *act as if it exists*” (Žižek, 2007, p. 10). If the subject arrives at the fact that behind the Other is essentially a void, they would be able to set themselves free from the chains of

its desires. In *A Hero*, we can identify the subject's passage from simply adhering to the law of desire to radically resisting the train of its demands.

Rahim proves indecisive, hesitant and submissive to representatives of the Other for more than two-thirds of the film. He shows an implicit belief in the Other as arbiter of justice, thus he acts according to its requests. In the Jewelry, where Rahim wants to sell the coins, he suddenly changes his mind because, as he later clarifies, he encounters signs that show the Other's opposition to his decision. The jeweler's calculator stops working as he is trying to calculate the price of coins, so he takes his pen to write down the figures but it does not work either. He explains to the TV reporter that a thought came to his mind that he "would be punished a hundredfold later in his life" (00:36:11-00:36:18) if he took another's belongings. He prefers to give the bag of coins to the real owner although he needs money to pay to his creditor. In this sense, he prefers what is morally just to his own interests, which is close to Kant's categorical imperative. For Kant (1993), all rational beings must act according to a universal maxim which requires them to disregard their benefits and practice moral good only as an end (p. 43). While this is initially well-received by the people around him, it is later suspected by everyone. One particular point of doubt comes when people discover that Rahim provided the prison's phone number instead of his own in the ad that he posted about the found bag of coins.

Whether out of pure conscience or selfish interests that he does moral good, Rahim initially wants to provide exact details about the incident, especially when he insists that it was not he who found the bag. When the prison official, Mr. Taheri, suggests that he is not supposed to tell the whole truth, he is torn between the Other's desire and his own. The prison officials act as representatives of the Other by dictating on the subject what is normal and permissible in the society. From here onwards, the subject attempts to move forward in accordance with what the Other wants from him. Aside from prison officials, there are certain forms of media, old and new, that affect Rahim's desire. Conventional media, the TV and the newspapers in particular, play a crucial role in determining the protagonist's actions whose function is to maintain order in the society. In the meantime, the social media, which proves even more powerful, moves in the opposite direction by damaging Rahim's ideal image as provided by the TV and the newspaper. It is under the pressure of such representatives of the Other that Rahim finds himself in a deadlock from which he cannot escape.

The local TV has two critical roles in the story: it shapes Rahim's desire and presents him as an ideal model to the people. Once Rahim returns to the prison after a two-day leave, the TV prepares a short interview with him and the prison officials. Sometime later, as Rahim is washing his clothes, an inmate informs him that he is being shown on the TV. He rushes to the prison TV

room, where he finds everyone thoughtfully watching the report on his action. The camera provides a close-up of Rahim, who examines the inmates' faces watching the TV, then it cuts to the TV screen, which is initially shown from an angle, but then takes over the whole filmic image. A 3-minute uninterrupted TV report smoothly turns into the dominant frame for everyone, especially the spectators. Such a gradual shift on the screen disturbs the spectators, and it is as if the Other interrupts and returns the look with a gaze, a gaze that devours the main narrative to present itself as truth. In other words, the TV screen projects the Other in its radical demanding nature. In the report, Rahim modifies the truth to provide a version that he thinks the Other desires, an account that contains a mixture of fact and fiction. Rahim remakes the scene by claiming that he found the bag in a bus stop, but he decided not to take it for himself because he thought he would be punished severely later in his life. Such a perspective implies that Rahim believes in an absolute power that would judge him because of his actions. Thus, Rahim sacrifices his own desire for an unseen Other who watches over everyone and provides justice in the world.

The TV report is a critical sequence in the film because it shows the complicated relationship between the Other and the subject. It displays how the law as superego monitors human action. A couple of statements Rahim makes during the interview with the TV might help illustrate the point. He hides the truth that he took the money from a loan shark, an act prohibited in the law of the symbolic order. Also, we know that he reconstructs a scene (finding the bag of

coins) from which he was absent. The spectators know that it was Rahim's girlfriend, not himself who found the bag of coins. Rahim modifies the truth to fit within the frame of desire as specified by the Other. In the same TV report, Rahim especially thanks the prison officials. If the prison is an agency of the Other, in the sense of a place that keeps in those who violated the law, then Rahim must present it as a flawless body that does not harm any of the prisoners. That is why Rahim praises the prison wardens because, as he claims, they improved the situation for the prisoners. Rahim's statement is later challenged by one of the prisoners who accuses him of fooling everyone around. The inmate contradicts him when he reveals that because of the wretched condition of the prison, one of the prisoners committed suicide in the prison washrooms recently.

The second important media that moves alongside the TV is the local newspaper. To promote Rahim as an example of a virtuous character, prison officials arrange for an interview by the local newspaper. When the interview is published, wherever Rahim goes, people welcome him with a smile, which makes him happy because it seems he has achieved a sense of moral superiority by moving in the precise path of the Other's desire. The newspaper interview has one more effective role in the film. We know that Farkhondeh's brother strongly opposes her marriage to Rahim because, as he tells his wife, "even if he is a saint, he has a grown-up child, he has been to prison, and he has no job" (00:46:25-00:46:30). However, immediately after Farkhondeh shows



him the local newspaper with Rahim's image and interview, the camera cuts to the next scene which shows him as he warmly greets Rahim in the street, a sign that shows his consent to the marriage.

In the charity event, Rahim goes to the extreme to become the object of the Other's desire. He brings his stuttering son to the event and lets him speak to evoke pity in the people and raise more money for his freedom. He corrects some of his words as he talks, and smiles with satisfaction when everyone claps for his tearful son. This scene complements a previous scene in which Rahim receives a certificate for his good deed. He is puzzled initially, then he spends a few seconds to examine it up until a moment when he is called by one of the event organizers to express his emotions. After the event, Bahram attempts to belittle what Rahim has done in a tense conversation with charity members. He provides us with a different version of ethics, which once again recalls Kant's categorical imperative. He points out that whatever Rahim has done does not deserve anything because he has done his duty as a human being: "even if we suppose that he has found a bag and has returned it to its owner, he has done his duty" (00:54:20-00:54:26). When the charity members argue against him, he goes even further: "I never dishonored anyone in my life. Should I be given a certificate?" (00:54:47-00:54:51). Eventually, Bahram gives his consent and Rahim gets closer to freedom. The charity event, which ends the first half of the film, serves as the

ultimate point of satisfaction for Rahim because he is worshipped as a hero who has successfully managed to please the Other and, at the same time, to be the object of the Other's desire.

### The Subject's Resistance Against the Other

While the formal media such as the local TV and newspapers play a significant role in shaping Rahim's mindset and, at the same time, create an ideal image of him as a hero, they encounter opposition from the social media. Bahram's daughter, Nazanin (Sarina Farhadi), starts a wave to sabotage Rahim's heroic image through sharing material on social media. She shares a message with the local council that proves Rahim was in prison when the bag of coins was found. Her information convinces the local council not to give Rahim the job they promised at the charity event. Nazanin's most successful attempt to shatter every illusion regarding Rahim's heroic image takes place when she shares a video that shows Rahim fiercely fighting Bahram in the latter's photocopy shop. Once the charity members watch the video, they argue with Rahim over his socially unacceptable action and decide not to provide him the money they raised during the event. These scenes show the layered structure of the Other since the local council and the charity organization need to obey the whims of social media.

Immediately after the start of the second half of the film everything turns upside down. Rahim's social image is challenged by the social media, and the people around him start

questioning his sincerity. The local council officer informs him that there are rumors everywhere about him and they need to examine everything carefully before employing him. He asks Rahim to find the woman he claims was the real owner of the bag of coins. To everyone's surprise, there is no sign of the woman. Rahim tells everyone that he did not even imagine that he would need her address or phone number later. From here onwards, a layer of uncertainty and mystery enshrouds the film. The TV cancels an interview with Rahim, and the charity gives the funds raised to another prisoner. Rahim's girlfriend asks the charity manager to inform the public that it was Rahim himself who out of sacrifice offered to give the money to another prisoner to save him from execution.

Rahim finds himself in a deadlock which is primarily caused by his blindly following the Other's demands. It is from this point that we witness a visible, yet gradual movement in his mindset. He realizes that the unending, paradoxical demands of the Other have paralyzed him as an individual. Rahim defies any credits given to him by representatives of the Other. When Mr. Taheri informs him that the news of his recent moral good has been announced by the charity, and asks him to make another video to promote him once again as a model, he firmly answers that he did not offer to give the money to another prisoner. Mr. Taheri insists that they make a video from his child and share it in social media to regain the public's favor. In the penultimate sequence of the film, Mr. Taheri is shown as he is taking a video from Rahim's son. He talks to Rahim's son

in a way to rouse his emotions and makes his eyes tearful. Rahim, who is watching everything in another room, sees how desperately Mr. Taheri is trying to save the face of the prison officials. Rahim does not want to use his son for his own purposes anymore. In the middle of the filming, he stops Mr. Taheri and firmly asks him to delete the recording. When Mr. Taheri says that he would not do so and leaves, Rahim furiously blocks him and forces him to delete it.

The final sequence of the film shows Rahim's last blow to the mechanisms of the Other. Initially, we are shown Farkhondeh's long shot, whose face turns from smile to grimace with pure awe as she sees Rahim from a distance. Rahim appears with a clean-shaved head with no beard, then he talks to Farkhondeh for a minute, and finally enters the prison gate to spend the rest of his sentence. His new appearance shows his will to make a change. Thus doing, he turns his back on the Other, and returns to prison to defy the mechanisms of power. In an interview about the film, Farhadi points out that "Rahim is, after all, a man always in doubt. With the exception of the film's end, it is others who make decisions for him" (Khoshbakht & Todd, 2023, P. 156). The film's ending shows that Rahim is more willing to stay in prison than to invest anymore in the Other.

### The Circular Structure of the Film and the Workings of Desire

As indicated in the previous section, Rahim eventually realizes that his investment in the Other's desire does not bring any satisfaction. According to Lacan (1998), desire points to an

essential lack, i.e., “*objet a*” or the object cause of desire (p. 103). The Other deceives the subject by promising them that the path of desire would lead to the discovery of the lost object. If the subject understands that the fantasy at the core of the Other’s desire is an impossibility, they would be able to reconsider their relationship with the Other. A closer look at the structure of Farhadi’s *A Hero* shows that Rahim attempts to move beyond the logic of the Other through actions that go against the expectations of the society.

There is a long staircase at the archeological site that Rahim climbs up and down at the beginning of the film. Rahim spends sometime to climb up the stairs, but then he has to immediately climb down because Hossein tells him that he should not have come up there. The stairs stand for the subject’s linear movement along the path of the Other’s desire, a path that promises recovery of the lost object. However, Rahim’s eventual downward movement shows the exact opposite. This initial scene is helpful because it foreshadows the protagonist’s circular movement throughout the film. Structurally speaking, *A Hero* is not a puzzle film. It follows the classic, linear storytelling in which there is not even a single flashback. There are rare sequences in which one could witness a return to the past to find the lost object, but they prove fruitless eventually. A notable example takes place when Rahim starts a quest to find the supposedly real owner of the bag of coins. Rahim finds only an image of the woman, which brings a ray of hope but eventually adds to the complexity of the matter. For McGowan (2004), “real enjoyment

involves an experience that the Other is incomplete and lacks the *objet petit a*” (p. 67). In simple words, it is only when the subject realizes that the Other is itself lacking and has nothing to offer that he is able to find joy.

*A Hero* starts with prison and ends in prison. At the beginning of the film, Rahim is shown from an angle as he is sitting in a corridor until the prison officer calls his name. When he exits the prison gate, he is overjoyed to have received a few days of freedom. An extreme long shot of Rahim outside of the prison extends the sense of freedom he feels to wherever he moves in. The film’s ending moves in the opposite direction. Rahim enters the prison and sits outside the registry office. His face is neutral and he looks at the world outside from the prison’s small door, until the same officer from the beginning of the film asks him to come forward without calling his name. Rahim expects freedom at the beginning of the film when he is given the leave, but he returns to prison with no hope of an imminent release at the end. The film starts with the same people and the same place, yet it shows a radical change in Rahim’s attitude toward the world around him. *A Hero*, then, is a site of repetitive, circular scenes in which desire is always thwarted, with an implicit outcome for the spectator: the more you persist in looking at the world around you with the logic of the Other’s desire, the less you shall get at the end.

## Conclusion

Asghar Farhadi's *A Hero* reimagines the relationship of the spectators with the filmic image through displaying the impossible workings of desire. In a world where the Other is in control of the subject's desire, they must learn to resist it even if such a resistance does not promise an ultimate satisfaction. The Other's power particularly stems from the subject's submission to its requests. If one simply gives in to the requests of the Other, one would eventually find oneself in a deadlock. The underlying circularity of the film's plotline asks for reconsideration and revision. When the subject understands that fantasy is only an illusion, a trap that never brings the object cause of desire, they would be able to free themselves from the chains of the Other.

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