CHAPTER TWO

Woody Allen: The Schlemiel as Modern Philosopher

If the amount of scholarship and criticism devoted to an artist's works forms an accurate index of professional status, Woody Allen ranks in the forefront of contemporary American directors. He is written about more frequently than any other American director working today. Among contemporary directors, in fact, the amount of written text devoted to Allen rivals that of such world-renowned directors as Akira Kurosawa, Jean-Luc Godard, Federico Fellini, and Ingmar Bergman. Books and articles devoted to Allen match the stack of works devoted to such acknowledged directors in the pantheon of American cinema as John Ford, Alfred Hitchcock, and Orson Welles. Allen has even achieved cult status through the publication of some strange books devoted to him and his work.[1]

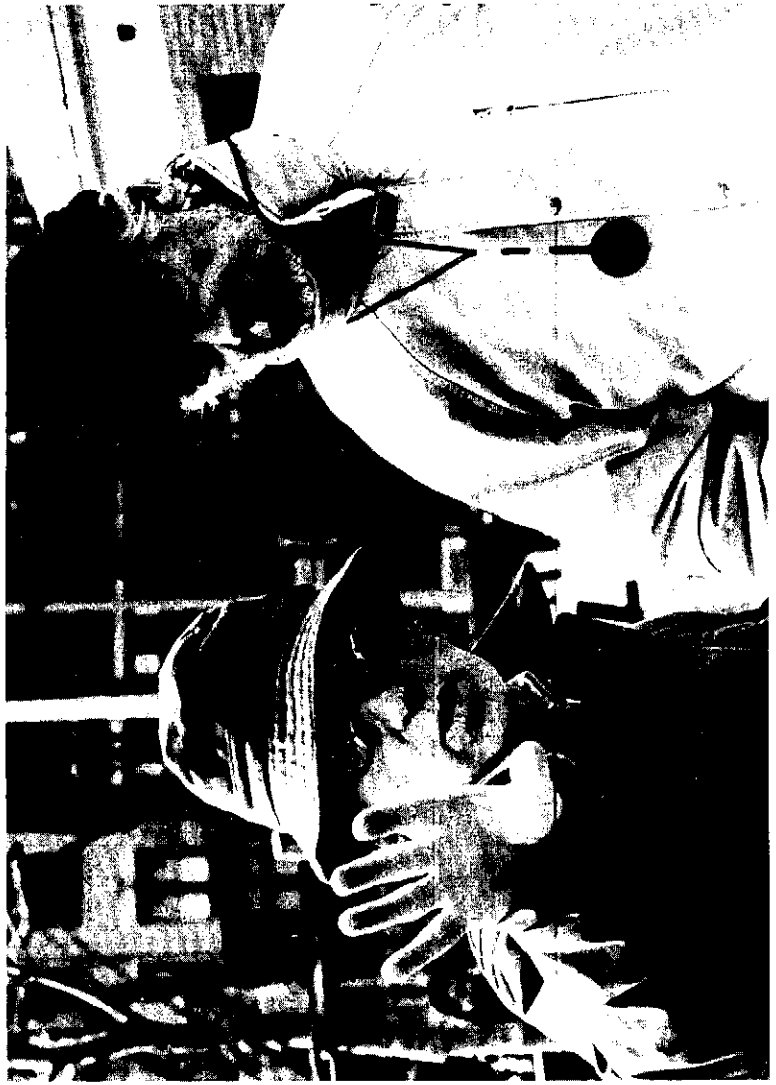
But Woody Allen remains neither the exclusive province of the academy nor the obscure object of the cultish. He has achieved a rare celebrity; he is as recognizable as any tabloid movie star, yet as respected for his work as any serious writer or political pundit. Even if his box-office success fails to measure up to some of his younger colleagues in Hollywood or New York, his status in American cinema is unique. He is a filmmaker who has almost total control over his projects, as well as almost totally insular working methods. Since 1969 he has been one of the most prolific of filmmakers, as well as one of the most respected and admired, in the United States.

Woody Allen has evolved into one of the few "public intellectuals" (the term is from Russell Jacoby) in America, a person working in the popular arenas of film, television, journalism, and literature who transcends the merely popular and transitory, but who never loses touch with this mass audience. The French critic Robert Benayoun, agreeing that Allen is "the only comic of international renown who can be described as an intellectual," feels that he "is

the first to found a reputation on an instantaneous reaction to the great problems of our times" (71). This status as a public intellectual is aided by Allen's position as the director, writer, and star of most of his films; as such he creates a recognizable persona. Moreover, his films appear autobiographical, so, given his status as a celebrity, Allen can count on his audience knowing at least the basic outlines of his life. In addition, the use of recurring motifs across the length and breadth of his career, and the repetition of certain jokes and situations, enables Allen to affirm his status as a genuine auteur and gain acceptance as a personal filmmaker, or author, with a private vision expressed in a public medium.

At the same time, Allen often goes to great pains to deny the similarities between his art and his life. For example, he rarely engages in the kind of discourse typical of celebrities; he no longer appears on television talk shows (as he did in the late 1960s and into the early 1970s, although infrequently) and only occasionally does celebrity interviews. Although he jealously guards his privacy, Allen's habits, such as eating at Elaine's or playing jazz clarinet, are well known. Such dualities bespeak a profound ambivalence about the whole concept of celebrity, as well as Allen's precise function within an industry devoted to public exposure. Such confusion continues as one of the ambiguities recognizable within Allen's life and work. Indeed, the huge amount of publicity generated by the bitter separation and custody battle surrounding the breakup of Allen's long-term relationship with Mia Farrow in August of 1992 may have resulted as much from Allen's renowned reclusiveness as from the events themselves. Here, after all, was new fodder for the voracious tabloids and the equally curious public. A comment Allen made on television summed up this aspect of the whole sordid affair: "This is the first public appearance I've made in years, and all my dialogue is straight lines." No doubt Allen's ambivalence about celebrity slipped over into abhorrence while his private life was subjected to an unpleasant public scrutiny he long tried to avoid.

A great deal of this public, intellectual popularity, and the sometimes-controversial elements that accompany it, springs from Allen's engagement with his own Jewishness and the Jewish experience in America. One particular engagement with Jewry might be taken as emblematic of Allen's status as a public intellectual and some of the dangers associated with such a position. In "Am I Reading the Papers Correctly?" in the January 28, 1988 op-ed section of the *New York Times* (around the beginning of the *intifada*), Allen



Woody Allen on the set of *Crimes and Misdemeanors* with director of photography Sven Nykvist.

notes that he is apolitical and that his few political stances in recent years accomplished nothing. He then decries what he characterizes as violent and cruel acts by Israeli soldiers against "the rioting Palestinians." In a somewhat strained attempt to inject a little humor into the piece, he wonders if these soldiers are "the people whose money I used to steal from those little blue-and-white cans after collecting funds for a Jewish homeland." More seriously, he feels "appalled beyond measure" at these actions and calls on Israel's supporters to do whatever they can to "bring this wrongheaded approach to a halt."

The letter unleashed a handful of duly printed responses a few days later, some accusing Allen of being a self-hating Jew. "But then one shouldn't be surprised," said one letter-writer. "In all Woody Allen movies there has always been a subtle, yet cutting edge of Jewish self-hatred." Another letter-writer similarly castigated his stance, claiming that "it sounds a tad specious coming from an artist who, in his films and writings, exploits a now-extinct Jewish culture while scrupulously avoiding any references to Israel, the Holocaust or any other relevant Jewish issue." The most interesting responses, however, wondered why that particular event inspired Allen's first serious foray into print on the political scene, for example, "I don't recall seeing an Op-Ed article by Mr. Allen at the time of the *Achille Lauro* or after the slaughter of young children at Maalot or following the massacre of Israeli athletes at Munich." Sidney Zion, himself a Jewish public intellectual, similarly mused, "Funny that the first time Woody Allen lets us in on his devotion to Israel and his eternal outrage against her enemies appears in a diatribe against Israeli tactics in the rioting territories."

The letter-writers could and did link Allen's films to his editorial stance, and the motif of self-hatred appeared in the two separate forums. The charge of self-hatred sounds perhaps extreme, but the point about Allen's motivations for this first foray into political polemics is worth pursuing. Significantly, he took a very public stand on a major issue in which Jews could be seen in a negative light. Although Allen attempts to keep his rhetoric light, to defuse negative responses by his ingenuous introduction, he never states why Israel's actions are, to his mind, wrong. Apparently, the wrongness appears self-evident. Indeed, by pointing out that Israeli soldiers were "dragging civilians out of their houses at random to smash them with sticks" or were firing real bullets into crowds of demonstrators, Allen leads most readers to agree with him on the basis of Western values and simple human decency. Yet

why was he not equally compelled to state these self-evident values when Arab violence was directed against Israel?

Allen chose not to answer his critics in the same journalistic forum of the *New York Times*. Rather, he selected another site to speak out again about Israel and the Palestinians, as well as to defend himself from some of the charges that had been leveled against him. This time, however, the forum was even more overtly Jewish than the *Times: Tikkun,* a leftist, liberal, intellectual journal overtly associated with Jewry. In an article entitled "Random Reflections of a Second-Rate Mind," Allen begins his ruminations with a recollection about seeing a Holocaust survivor eating at a trendy New York City restaurant and wondering about the vast difference between the man's life now and his death-camp experience. This inspires him to remember Elie Wiesel's statement that, upon liberation, the camp survivors thought about many things, but revenge against the Nazis was not among them. Allen remarks that he, who lived a comfortable, safe life in America, "think[s] of nothing but revenge" (13).

Yet from this historically and culturally specific tale of the Jewish experience, Allen goes on to wonder about the need, the humanity, of specifying a journal for Jews. "Aren't there enough real demarcations without creating artificial ones? . . . do I really want to contribute to a magazine that subtly helps promulgate phony and harmful differences?" (13, 14). Yet contribute he certainly did.

From such an ambivalent stance, we might conclude that Allen remains uneasy about his status as a Jewish filmmaker, a Jewish figure of importance. He clearly strives to deny his association with Jewry, yet he chose to write an op-ed piece about Israel and an article in a magazine exclusively identified as a "Bimonthly Jewish Critique of Politics, Culture and Society." Even earlier, many of the stories he published in the *New Yorker* convey a Jewish perspective and emerge from a distinctly Jewish consciousness. Predictably, in the pages of *Tikkun* he took as much punishment and received as much derision as he did in the *Times*.

Allen's career represents a virtual case history in coming to terms with tradition, with the search for an appropriate personal model of artistic creation sifted through a set of circumstances characteristic of a large portion of American Jewry. His films participate in the stream of American-Jewish art and literature that uses the structure of the bildungsroman to examine the emerging, maturing self and its relation to the world. His films, further, rely

heavily upon the classic characteristics of Jewish humor and target aspects of popular culture. Allen's cinema, however, participates little in the search for social justice, a point for which he has been criticized, most often by Jewish critics. Instead, he reaches beyond the moment for larger social and religious truths. In this respect, Allen's cinema draws as much on other traditions as the Jewish ones identified in chapter 1, particularly relying upon the tradition of European art cinema exemplified for Allen, as for most audiences, by Bergman and Fellini.

Allen archetypically represents the American-Jewish artist in his reproduction of the absent tradition of American-Jewish art: Judaism. In fact, Judaism is the structuring absence of his mature films; his cinema is a constant working out of this missing link, a continual search for a substitute for Judaism. Jewish artists often manifest this absence through the search for social justice or the participation in popular life-style trends. For Allen, however, the cinema itself substitutes for Judaism. Although he began his film career by humorously parodying earlier films and film forms, his career has gradually explored the place of movies within a complete, meaningful life. This life will be lived in the predominant settings associated with American Jewry—urban America, often within the world of show business—but meaning will be derived from a search for the transcendent found in the movies.

Allen's search for traditions is also a matter of coming to terms with influences, many of which derive from Jewishness although he borrows from other significant traditions as well. In addition to the tradition of European art cinema, he draws upon the tradition of American silent comedy, especially the works of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd. In fact, Allen's cinema progresses precisely by the degree to which he gradually abandons the established physical traditions of comedy in favor of a metaphysical approach exemplified by Bergman and Fellini.

Allen's reproduction of the image of the little man owes a specific debt to Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd, as well as to the schlemiel figure. The little man at odds with his environment remains an apt metaphor for the Jewish experience in history, but it persists as an equally potent contemporary symbol and is an often-used comic device. Allen's combination of the Jewish aspects of the schlemiel with the physical characteristics of the silent clowns presents an image of a man eternally bewildered by a hostile universe. In this respect, Allen typically reproduces the basic humor in the situa-

tions of classic comedies: of Charlie Chaplin's Tramp in the Alaskan Gold Rush, of Buster Keaton becoming a boxer or a general, or of Harold Lloyd's Freshman trying out for the football team.

Allen's filmic influences, then, are many. Confining ourselves to a discussion of the influences of Jewish tradition and experience in America on his films is not done with the intention of impoverishing them or denying the range of Allen's borrowings, transformations, or unique contributions. Rather, it is important to understand the particular nature of his films and the concerns they manifest by recourse to what is surely a fundamental influence on Allen's life: growing up Jewish in America. It is not our intention to reduce Allen in any way to the sum of his influences or his background, but rather to tease out the profound and personal aspects of his films by recourse to the definitional motifs of Jewish life in America.

Woody Allen—Allen Stewart Konigsberg—was born December 1, 1935 in Brooklyn. After graduating from Midwood High School, he attended New York University and City College of New York, without attaining a degree from either school. Allen began his career in show business as a gag writer, submitting jokes to newspaper and television personalities such as Walter Winchell, Earl Wilson, and Ed Sullivan. He then wrote for television shows, including "The Tonight Show" (1960–62) and, earlier, "Your Show of Shows" starring Sid Caesar, where he worked with other Jewish comic writers such as Mel Brooks, Larry Gelbart, Carl Reiner, and Neil Simon. At the urging of his agents Charles Joffe and Jack Rollins, he became a stand-up comic in the early 1960s, adopting the persona of the little loser, the schlemiel, in awe of women and unable to succeed with them. Accentuating his slight stature, glasses, and already thinning red hair, Allen's extremely self-deprecating humor focused upon his own shortcomings and failures. Little in his stand-up routines explored the politics of the day; he was no Mort Sahl and certainly no Lenny Bruce, except in his clever language and precise insights.

The kind of parody predominant in "Your Show of Shows" was equally evident in Allen's written humor, beginning in 1966 with his sketches for the *New Yorker*. Here he brilliantly replicated serious literary forms, such as the scholarly biography or the philosophical treatise, but filled them with inappropriate content, the humor resulting from an obvious clash between form and content. In "Yes, but Can the Steam Engine Do This?" he recreated the career of the Earl of Sandwich, whose accomplishment he likens to those of Da

Vinci, Aristotle, and Shakespeare. In a parody of the dramatic style of literary biography, Allen offered such gems as, "living in the country on a small inheritance, he works day and night, often skimping on meals to save money for food" (*Getting Even* 34). Other parodies included "Mr. Big" (a hard-boiled detective story in which the private eye searches the mean streets for God) and the writing styles of Dostoyevsky ("Notes from the Overfed") and Hemingway ("A Twenties Memory").

In addition to simple literary parody, the humorous style of the stories is extremely Jewish. Allen, for example, reproduces the essential strategy of linking disparate realms, especially the sacred and the profane. Often, he applies this tactic overtly to Jewish motifs, as in "Hassidic [*sic*] Tales, with a Guide to Their Interpretation by the Noted Scholar." Generally, however, the metaphysically serious rubs up against the hopelessly mundane, as when the philosopher Metterling proves "not only that Kant was wrong about the universe but that he never picked up a check" (10). Other one-liners demonstrate this subject as well, such as "eternal nothingness is O.K. if you're dressed for it," and "the universe is merely a fleeting idea in God's mind—a pretty uncomfortable thought, particularly if you've just made a down payment on a house" (31). Allen also combined parody and the yoking of disparate realms in the playlet *Death Knocks*. Here, a personified Death, inspired by Ingmar Bergman's *Seventh Seal*, plays gin rummy—not chess—with his unwilling victim. The victim wins more time, and Death owes him $28!

The *New Yorker* sketches clearly reveal a tension that structures Allen's entire career: his ability to link disparate realms for his own interests. As he began writing popular film comedies, he also created humor out of parodies of serious, intellectual subjects. In his film works, Allen would also move between the high-brow and the popular, although eventually his parodies of the serious would turn toward genuinely serious attempts at similar subjects. He then found himself in a struggle between intellectuality and popularity, as well as the serious and the humorous.

Finally, his early *New Yorker* writings confronted Jewishness and Judaism in a way that his films would only later. They reveal, through humor, an attitude toward Judaism that veers toward irreverence if not yet hostility. In the "Hassidic Tales," for instance, a woman asks a famous rabbi why Jews are not allowed to eat pork. "We're not? Uh-oh," he responds. In "The Scrolls," Allen rewrites the story of Abraham's command to sacrifice Isaac, with God telling

Abraham that He was only kidding, and chiding the patriarch for his gullibility: "some men will follow any order no matter how asinine as long as it comes from a resonant, well-modulated voice" (*Without Feathers* 27).

Between the writing of *What's New, Pussycat?* (1965) and *Casino Royale* (1967), Allen redubbed a Japanese spy thriller to create the comic *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* (1966). *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* also clearly demonstrates Allen's debt to Sid Caesar, particularly to a "Your Show of Shows" sketch parodying samurai movies, a cultural coup for a writing staff creating skits in the late 1950s. One of the least of the concerns in *Tiger Lily* was Jewishness. Yet, even here, Allen's ethnic sensibilities appear. The (Japanese) hero is called Phil Moscowitz, and a character calls for his rabbi after being shot. Brode concludes that this film enabled Allen "to introduce what will become a key theme: assimilation of Jews into non-Jewish lifestyles" (65). But such a comment, although astute, fails to see the larger issue. Rather than simply thematizing the issue of assimilation, Allen introduces Jewishness as a source of humor, the wellspring from which his unique comic perspective will derive its particular vision.

The specifically Jewish dimensions to Allen's work in the period leading up to *Annie Hall* were few and usually covert. He made his official directorial debut with *Take the Money and Run* (1969), which featured him as an incompetent criminal. Filmic parody and the schlemiel persona again dominated the film, which also incorporated a handful of ethnic gags. In this, his first film as writer-director-star, Allen began to focus upon his Jewish background and, as would often be the case in his later films, the images presented are disturbing. In particular, he gratuitously uses the image of a rabbi for broad humor. For example, as a prisoner, he ingests an experimental drug that has side effects that turn him into a rabbi—visually, a Hasidic rabbi. Much of the rest of the ethnic humor is subtle. The image of Allen's character being beaten by neighborhood bullies looks forward to the more explicitly anti-Semitic nature of such beatings claimed for the character of Zelig in the film of that name. Similarly, the hero's parents, absurdly disguised in Groucho glasses, squabble and snap at each other and condemn their wayward son at every turn.

More important than specifically overt ethnic humor, the basic situation of *Take the Money and Run,* as well as Allen's succeeding films for the next six years, represents a decidedly Jewish perspective in terms of his constant use of the "fish out of water" structure:

the difficulty of the little Jew trying to assimilate into a predominantly non-Jewish society. Allen's Virgil Starkwell desperately wants to succeed and fit in, even within the world of crime. Voice-over narration tells the audience that, indeed, "he wanted only to belong," and "he was unable to fit in with any aspect of his environment." (The parallels with *Zelig* continue to resonate.) But such a claim may provide a too simplistic, or at least too reductive, an explanation, for Allen is working in classic comic territory. The very sight of him portraying a would-be gangster and laboring on a chain gang makes the audience laugh, as the discrepancy between Allen's physical appearance clashes with the image we hold—even if derived from movies—of real gangsters. Similarly, Allen the neurotic urbanite as a Latin American revolutionary (*Bananas*), or Allen the disheveled bumbler as a feared revolutionary in a dystopic future (*Sleeper*), or Allen the frail coward as a Tolstoyan hero during the Napoleonic Wars (*Love and Death*) creates comic dissonance between competing images, a discontinuity that is inherently funny.

Allen again mimed the little man at odds with his environment, along with the disparity between image and reality, in *Bananas* (1971), his follow-up to *Take the Money and Run.* Working the same vein as "Viva Vargas," his short story of the same period, *Bananas* displays little feel for genuine political humor. Allen's essentially apolitical nature, his distrust of politicians and their solutions, generates little sympathy for either side of any political question. His heart, not his ideals, motivates him to make a powerful political statement. Two essential features of his awkward (and awkwardly named) protagonist, Fielding Mellish, are apparent. First, Fielding, a neurotic urbanite, is not only out of place amid Che Guevara-like Latino revolutionaries, but he is also out of tune with his Manhattan surroundings. He fears the urban jungle on the subway ride home from work as much as he later fears the steamy jungle of the mythic Latin American revolutionary sojourn. Here the classic schlemiel, the total nebbish, fails once again to master machines in his job as a product tester, a failing that mirrors his inability to succeed with women. Second, he undertakes a dangerous and foolish task precisely to impress a woman.

With *Take the Money and Run* and *Bananas,* Allen set his films on a stable and consistent course. The endearing schlemiel persona, combined with a caustic eye for popular culture and a penchant for the parodic, still characterize most of them. Lacking in these first two films, however, was a fourth component: a command of, and an appreciation for, the cinema. In both *Play It Again, Sam* (1972) and

Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex (*but Were Afraid to Ask)* (1972) Allen developed a more cinematic sensibility than had been apparent previously. Although Allen did not direct *Sam,* he adapted his own Broadway play with an eye toward opening it up for the screen and assumed the lead role under Herbert Ross's direction. More important, the near-religious awe with which he regards the cinema and the possibility that movies hold for transcending ordinary existence are evident.

Play It Again, Sam marked the first major statement of Allen's developing view of the cinema. In this parody of *Casablanca,* he reveals how the cinema dominates the hero's life (seemingly to his detriment), yet how it also provides a positive model of behavior—indeed, a positive worldview. Allan Felix (Allen's alter ego), a film buff, writes for a small, San Francisco-based movie magazine. Beyond simply making his living from watching films or even merely enjoying the movies, Felix defines his life by the images he sees on the screen. His dreams become flesh as he conjures up an image of Humphrey Bogart (Jerry Lacy), to seek advice about love and life. Bogey, a creature from the id for Allan Felix, presents a purified extract of the tough-guy, cynical Bogart persona. Thus, for example, Allan's failures with women since his divorce from Nancy (Susan Anspach) contrast starkly to Bogart's casually disdainful success with "dames." Nervously awaiting a blind date, Allan imagines himself as Bogey, having to slap the woman around when she begs him for more. Bogey's basic advice to Allan: "dames are simple—they understand a slap in the face or a slug from a .45."

The interpellation of imagined films within the film forms part of the larger pattern of *Play It Again, Sam,* which completely interpellates *Casablanca.* The film does not simply "borrow" the famous airport scene from Curtiz's classic, but rather transposes Casablanca to San Francisco, simultaneously transposing the mini-drama of World War II to a mini-comedy of the war between the sexes. Allen's *Sam* is essentially a remake of *Casablanca* and possesses almost all of the film's key ingredients. In transposing the film to a contemporary locale and eliminating the larger surrounding issue of World War II, Allen's film domesticates the exoticism of *Casablanca* and lowers the stakes, precisely the definition of comedy (Jewish comedy, in particular): the domestication of myth. Allen, in occupying the place of Bogart in this remake, uses the implicit disjuncture between his screen persona and that of Bogart's to comic effect.

On closer examination, however, mere comedy, or even mere parody, are not what is at stake here. Rather, *Sam* is about the relationship between film and life. The film poses two questions in its use of *Casablanca.* Can real life provide the opportunities for heroism that *Casablanca* gave Bogart, who had to sacrifice the woman he loved for a larger cause? Can movies provide a glimpse of transcendent moments that we can use in our own lives? *Sam* implicitly answers the first question affirmatively. Allan Felix does not give Linda up for the sake of the Allied cause (and does not really have to give up Linda, for she has already decided to go back to Dick), but for the sake of his friend. As Bogey tells him, helping a pal is a good thing to do. The second question is more problematic but precisely the one Woody Allen ponders in virtually all of his subsequent important films.

Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex (*but Were Afraid to Ask),* which followed *Sam* almost immediately, was inspired by a bestseller by Dr. David Reuben, a pop-culture phenomenon of the era. Allen's film, really a series of sketches, uses Reuben's actual headings for discussions of sexual topics. The sketches satirize rather than illustrate Reuben's points, however. Allen's particular genius moved him beyond satire to clothe the sketches in images drawn from another realm of popular culture: the movies. As Allen recognized in *Play It Again, Sam,* people take lessons from the movies. What happens on the screen greatly influences ideas, particularly images of romance and sex. Allen films each sketch in a different cinematic style, with the topic of each scene determining the particular style or form and greatly adding to the comedy. For example, "Do Aphrodisiacs Work?" is illustrated by a costume sketch in which the medieval world of alchemy and wizardry provides a fitting setting to ponder the pseudo-science of love potions. Similarly, "Why Do Some Women Have Trouble Reaching an Orgasm?" becomes a perfect parody of the world of Michelangelo Antonioni, whose films, for example, *L'Avventura, La Notte,* and *L'Eclisse* (1960–62), deal with existential angst, with the sterility of contemporary middle-class life accompanied by a propensity for sterile, near-empty mise-en-scène. Angst and ennui characterize the couple in Allen's exact reproduction (in color, not black and white, however) of Antonioni's sterile, passionless world. While choosing the proper parodic style, Allen learned to perfect his own cinematic technique.

Although David Reuben himself was Jewish, little beyond the sociological emphasis was "Jewish" in his book. Yet a number of the sketches (four out of seven) in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know*

About Sex cast characters as clearly Jewish. In "What Is Sodomy?" Gene Wilder stars as a "superstraight Jewish doctor" (Brode 129); in "Are Transvestites Homosexuals?" Lou Jacobi's character reads as clearly Jewish; in the concluding sequence, "What Happens during Ejaculation?" Allen himself (as a spermatozoon) exclaims "At least he's Jewish!" in reference to the person whose spermatozoon he is. The "What Are Sex Perverts?" sequence parodies the television game show "What's My Line?" and features a rabbi (Baruch Lumet, Sidney Lumet's father) whose secret fantasy is to be whipped by a statuesque shiksa while his wife eats pork. As Vincent Canby drily noted in the *New York Times* on August 7, 1972, the sketch "will not endear Mr. Allen to the Anti-Defamation League." (He was right; B'nai B'rith did protest the scene.) Beyond the possible cry of self-hatred, why introduce Jewishness at this point?

Let us return, for a moment, to Sig Altman's insightful recognition of the comic image of the Jew. The association of Jews with comedy, of Jews as being humorous, can help explain why Gene Wilder, Lou Jacobi, Baruch Lumet, and Allen himself play the roles that they do. Another reason concerns social class and comic discrepancy. Again and again it is apparent that Allen uses the disjunction between image and reality as a source of humor. For example, in *Bananas,* Allen, the neurotic Jew as Latino revolutionary, provides one instance of the strategy. The same dislocation operates in this case. Gene Wilder is not simply a doctor, but a psychiatrist.

Allen's own ventures into psychoanalysis, by now well known and a frequent source of one-liners in his cinema, immediately bring *Sleeper, Stardust Memories,* and *Zelig* to mind as containing jokes at psychiatry's expense. Allen pokes fun at both himself for being an analysand and at the analyst fallen victim to a mental aberration of his own. More important, Allen plays upon the image of the Jewish doctor-psychiatrist as an educated man of science, as assimilated into intellectual discourse, falling in love so inappropriately (not with a shiksa, but with a sheep). Alternately, Lou Jacobi's Sam is an average family man, a typical, middle-class husband and father. The sight of him prancing around in a dress is funny precisely because it deviates from middle-class norms. As Nancy Pogel has it, "for a moment he . . . achieves a moment of playful freedom" (61). This freedom from restrictions—from the middle-class morality that characterizes American culture and Jewish culture in America—is perhaps Allen rebelling less against Jewry than against the middle class. He remains equally as ambivalent about his social class as about his ethnicity.

In *Sleeper* (1973), his most assured and cinematically successful film yet, Allen directed himself opposite Diane Keaton for the first time; he was also the first filmmaker to give her an essentially comic leading role. Even more than in *Sam,* their chemistry was based upon one of the essential conflicts in Allen's films: Jew-WASP. The meeting and romancing of the WASP woman and the Jewish man primarily involves the man educating the woman and making her aware of the complexities of life. She, in turn, provides him with the confidence to be himself. *Sleeper* mines the genre of dystopic fiction, the creation of a future world gone awry. But rather than parody science fiction, as does Mel Brooks's *Spaceballs* (1987), *Sleeper* stands as a comic science-fiction film in its own right. Like most good science fiction (and most good comedy, for that matter), its alternate world comments primarily on the present rather than the future, on our world rather than our great-grandchildren's.

A strong use of regional humor and intellectual satire by no means exhausts the comic and serious aspects of *Sleeper:* its ethnic aspect is equally important. A memorably funny sequence involves the Jewish robot-tailors, whose humor stems from their anachronistic dialect and Bergsonian actions. Although funny, the fact that they are stereotypically Jewish also says something about the durability of ethnic stereotypes (which have negative connotations) and about the positive maintenance of ethnic difference. Like an earlier ethnic joke in the film—all of the men in this future society are impotent except those whose ancestors were Italian—this joke speaks of ethnicity as contributing toward a unique identity in a conformative world.

Jewishness is again invoked in an extended sequence revolving precisely around the question of identity. Having been reprogrammed into a new identity by the State, Miles Monroe (Allen) needs to be deprogrammed by the Rebellion. To accomplish this, the muscleman Erno (John Beck) and Luna, a shiksa (Keaton), undertake to initiate a scene from Miles's youth. They act out a seder (the Passover ritual meal) and mangle the Yiddish-inflected dialect of Miles's parents. Erno badly mispronounces "oy vey iz meir," and Luna tells Miles to "be quiet and eat your shiksa!" The double entendre, of course, completely bypasses those who do not have at least this one word of Yiddish at their command.

Significantly, this re-brainwashing does not quite work just yet, for Miles becomes, not his old self, but Blanche DuBois of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire.* Nancy Pogel sees this moment as revelatory of how Miles's role as Blanche is as equally inap-

propriate for a Jewish boy as Luna and Erno's parent roles were for two WASPs (69). But this seems to be kvetching a bit, for Miles has assumed a role quite like his own: a frail, bewildered outsider unable to live in a cruel, cold, dehumanized world. That Miles becomes Blanche while Luna acts out Stanley partakes of the humorous tradition of cross-dressing, which made fortunes for the likes of Milton Berle and Monty Python's Flying Circus, among others. Equally important, Miles's transformation marks the second time in the film that Allen crosses gender. In the earlier brainwashing undertaken by the State to make Miles a citizen, he participated in a Miss America contest (as Miss Montana), thereby transforming the neurotic, urban Jewish man into an all-American, clean-living, rural WASP woman. Although we should not make too much of this "transvestite" comedy, or the earlier cross-dressing sequence in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex,* we can note that cross-dressing is *not* usually a part of Allen's repertoire; gender-crossing marks the most significant absence in the transformative powers of Leonard Zelig, for example.

The most likely reason for the unqualified comic and cinematic success of *Sleeper* springs from the basic image of the film: the alien. Good comedy involves a disjuncture between image and reality, between self-image and self-deception, between aspirations and actualities. Good comedy can also be built around the image of the little guy struggling to come to terms with a hostile universe, as well as by using the figure of the outsider who cannot—and does not want—to come to terms with his environment. Chaplin's Tramp demonstrates and apotheosises these assertions, however this image in *Sleeper* stems from the historic situation of Jews in a gentile world. Not only is the little Jew from 1973 an outsider in this dystopic future of 2173, but the State also perceives him as a hostile, intrusive, dangerous force who cannot be allowed to contaminate citizens. Because *Sleeper* is a comedy and not an allegory of the Holocaust, this futuristic society "reprograms" Miles Monroe instead of putting him to death. However, the sense of alienation he feels, the persecution he experiences, and the uncomfortable accommodation he makes to this repressive society are telling derivations of the historical situation of the Jews. The millenarian, utopian yearnings of American Jewry encounter the dystopic future (that is, present) that Jews have more often than not faced. That Miles finds solace only "in the two things that come once in life—sex and death" typifies Allen's solution to his historical and metaphysical situation.

"Sex and death" as the ultimate meanings of life become transformed slightly into *Love and Death* (1975), Allen's next film. *Sleeper* and *Love and Death,* again with Diane Keaton, remain his most completely "funny" films, precisely the kind of "earlier, funny ones" that the aliens of *Stardust Memories* wish Allen would continue to make. *Sleeper* demonstrated Allen's growing mastery of visual comedy; *Love and Death* demonstrated that a return to the verbal humor of his stand-up comedy days did not mean abandoning his evolving cinematic consciousness.

Love and Death takes its comic force from, again, the disjunction between image and reality, between form and content, between WASP and Jew. The film emphasizes the enormity of the disjunctures Allen uses. While he had perfectly inhabited the schlemiel persona and completely metamorphized into the schlemiel as "modern hero," his authorial genius now placed this schlemiel onto the epic stage. An obvious derivation from *War and Peace*—the film is set during the Napoleonic Wars, with Allen's alter ego, Boris, on a mission to assassinate the French general—*Love and Death* recognizes the contemporary impossibility of the epic. Indeed, following Tolstoy, the literary epic turns inward to Proust, James Joyce, "The Waste Land," and the comedy of Woody Allen. The film similarly derives much force from anachronism, from a modern sensibility at odds with a different epoch. As Foster Hirsch notes, *Sleeper* puts the very modern Woody Allen into a future in which his character has no place; *Love and Death* has the same strategy, except that it places the modern, urban neurotic into the pastoral past (70).

Although little of the film is explicitly Jewish, a few Jewish, or anti-Jewish, jokes do occur. For example, Boris says about Jewish women: "I hear [they] don't believe in sex after marriage." Yet, much of the comedy revolves around the sudden thrusting downward from the sacred to the mundane, a particular characteristic of Jewish humor. Nancy Pogel neatly describes Allen's humor in *Love and Death* as being "based on the incongruity between the weighty concerns and abstract rhetoric of philosophy and literature, and ordinary people's down-to-earth needs" (70).

For a film that seems to be only marginally Jewish, much of the humor in *Love and Death* derives from Jewish tradition, and the metaphysical musings keenly indicate its absence. Allen structures the film much as Bergman did for *The Seventh Seal.* However, Allen's film results in a series of cosmic jokes equal to his best *New Yorker* jottings. For example, Sonia (Keaton) is equally as philosophical as Boris (a reversal from Keaton's role in *Sleeper*). She com-

mands Boris: "Look at this leaf. Isn't it perfect? And this one, too. Yes. I definitely think this is the best of all possible worlds." To which Boris replies: "It's certainly the most expensive." When, as a young boy, he meets Death, Boris asks, "What happens after we die? Heaven, Hell? God? [Pause.] Are there girls?" He needs a sign of God's existence, one small miracle, like his Uncle Sasha picking up a check. Allen also delivers one of his most famous religious pronouncements when he says of God, "the worst thing you can say about Him is that He's basically an underachiever."

Unsurprisingly, the only meaning that Boris can find in life is in love. His relationship to Sonia, and a sexual dalliance with a gorgeous countess, provide the sole semblances of value in a doomed existence. Yet love is fraught with peril. In a motif that will be repeated in *Manhattan, Stardust Memories,* and *Crimes and Misdemeanors,* we learn that people fall in love with the wrong person. Boris loves Sonia, but Sonia is in love with his brother, "a Neanderthal who can barely spell his name in the dirt with a stick" (Pogel 73). If love is irrational and usually unsatisfying, however, it is also interrupted by death. Love and death are the two things that come once in a lifetime.

Between 1965, with the writing of *What's New, Pussycat?* and 1975, with writing, directing, and starring in *Love and Death,* Allen was intimately involved in the production of ten feature films. He also continued to write short stories (publishing primarily in the *New Yorker*), made an occasional television appearance, and even produced three television specials. It is understandable, then, that in 1976 he took a break from filmmaking to star in a film that he neither wrote nor directed. The film, however, was not a mere diversion or a complete abandonment of the issues, motifs, and concerns that obsess him. If more overtly political than a typical Allen feature, *The Front* allowed him to express his usually private politics in a public forum.

The Front, the story of a small-time hustler (Allen) involved with blacklisted writers during the McCarthy era of the 1950s, carried forward three central motifs of Jewish life in America: show business (here television, in which Allen was employed during the 1950s); the importance of love relationships; and Jewishness itself. Although the script is never specific on the issue, one cannot miss the Jewishness of the blacklisted writers and stars with whom Allen's character Howard Prince (himself Jewish) comes into contact. With good intentions as well as personal anguish behind the film (end credits identify many of the cast and crew as victims of the

blacklist), *The Front* had the potential to be a powerful indictment of the blacklist and the anti-Semitism that fueled much of it. Yet the typical Hollywood ending—Howard tells off the House Un-American Activities Committee—is a cathartic moment, mutes the political outrage, and avoids any notion of the origins and intentions behind the blacklist. Yet Allen's choice was well-intentioned. Perhaps the story, which could have been his own had he been older and more involved politically, inspired him to make films that did tell his own story in truthful, overt, and honest ways.

Following the huge commercial and critical success of *Annie Hall* (1977), Allen wrote and directed *Interiors* (1978), the first of three films of a trilogy that we term "Attack of the WASP Women." By his on-screen absence Allen declared these films to be "serious," as if a focus on Jews could only be funny and his mere presence denotes comedy and Jewishness. To a large extent, that is indeed the case, because Allen had long identified *Jewish* with *humor* and himself as an on-screen Jewish persona. As he told Douglas Brode, "my presence is so completely associated with comedy that when the audience sees me, they might think it's a sign for them to begin laughing" (179). Thus, he had to eliminate his on-screen presence in his three films about upper-middle-class angst and dysfunctional families. Allen, in an interview with Robert Benayoun, has expressed the notion that his earlier films were trivial, a syndrome of screen comedy going all the way back to Charlie Chaplin, whose first non-comic film, *A Woman of Paris* (1923), was the first of his own films in which he did not star. Chaplin could not resist injecting sentimental or supposedly serious motifs in even such comic films as *City Lights* (1931), *The Great Dictator* (1942), and *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947). He observed to Benayoun that his earlier films were "curtain raisers, entertainments, and desserts: they lacked substance. I felt trapped in a dead end." Through the use of such models as O'Neill, Chekhov, and, of course, Ingmar Bergman, whose *Cries and Whispers* lurks behind the scenes of *Interiors,* Allen tried to escape the trap of comedy (Benayoun 157). In a line worthy of Allen himself, Maurice Yacowar maintains the resultant film "can be described as a Chekhovian vision of an O'Neill family, expressed with Bergmanesque rigor" (*Loser* 186).

Interiors and the later films of the trilogy are important not because of their quality as cinema (by any standards, they are minor works), but because of what they reveal of the underlying tensions that structure Allen's best work. These tensions may be charted by a series of oppositions: Jew-Gentile, Man-Woman, Neurotic-

Psychotic, Mother-Father, Son-Daughter, and Urban-Rural. Although Allen has been accused of self-hatred, the peculiarly Jewish form of anti-Semitism, the WASP Women films reveal that he does not offer upper-class Anglo-Saxon values and behavior as alternatives to being Jewish. The WASP family of *Interiors* is comprised of three sisters, Diane Keaton, Marybeth Hurt, and Kristen Griffith (the Chekhov allusion must be clear), with a powerful, attractive father, Arthur (E. G. Marshall), and a cold, severe mother, Eve (Geraldine Page). The film focuses on how Arthur's desire to leave his wife for another woman affects Eve and the daughters.

We see the family as distant, uncommunicative, and unsupportive. The interiors of the title refer not only to the family's home, but also to the interior lives of the characters. The film evolves into a psychoanalytic case study of a dysfunctional family, exploring how family dynamics conspire to cause two of the daughters to have unhappy marriages and all to be inchoately yet clearly dissatisfied with their lives. Ultimately, their mother commits suicide, although the girls respond less to her death and more to their father's choice of a second wife, Pearl (Maureen Stapleton), a "vulgarian" constructed (but not mentioned) as Jewish.

The Jewishness of Pearl has been thoroughly explicated by Maurice Yacowar, who notes that "Pearl functions like Allen's Jewish hero in his comedies with Diane Keaton, in which the life-affirming Jew plays against and enlivens the controlled WASP" (*Loser* 191). He notes, too, that Pearl's "Jewishness is more a matter of class than religion, and her religious sense is primitive." This is consistent with how Allen views Jewishness elsewhere: the religious dimension, Judaism, is almost always absent from Jews in his films. As Pogel notes, "Pearl is associated with primitive mysteries . . . she is interested in voodoo and collects African fertility statues" (104). She does card tricks, which Woody Allen boasted proudly of being able to do when he was interviewed by Benayoun (159). Pearl's place of residence, Florida (and, obviously, not northern Florida), and the fact that her former husbands were a jeweler and an orthodontist similarly help construct her as Jewish. Yacowar notes that Eve is Pearl's opposite. She spends a good deal of time in churches or cathedrals. Yacowar believes that a fundamentalist radio program to which she listens symbolizes her replacement by Pearl (191). In an interview on this program, a converted Jew tells of how wonderful it is to be a Christian, an idea later reversed by the Jewish woman replacing the Christian one in the family drama.

September (1988), the second film in the WASP Women trilogy, was

a major departure. Yet it contains the ensemble acting that Allen had begun to use in *Interiors*. The frequently recurring show business milieu in this story concerns a famous, spoiled, monstrously egocentric actress (Elaine Stritch) and her mousy, timid, talentless daughter (Mia Farrow). The mother is not simply cold to her child, but cruel, her ultimate cruelty not revealed until the end of the film. The film, loosely based upon a famous incident in the life of Lana Turner, whose daughter (Cheryl Crane) shot Turner's gangster-lover (Johnny Stompanato), is the real-life stuff of melodrama, but Allen's film functions less like a Lana Turner soap opera than an Ibsen melodrama.[2] Unfortunately, Ibsen no longer works as an appropriate model even for theater, and his style is deadly dull on film.

In *Another Woman* (1988), the trilogy's most successful film, Allen moves away from a dysfunctional family and focuses on a more adult woman (Gena Rowlands), ignoring the neoadolescent whinings of adult-aged characters. The implicit psychoanalytic view of the characters of the earlier films here becomes explicit, with its focus on a philosophy professor who is exposed to the psychoanalytic process. Although the film appears indebted to Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957) and *Face to Face* (1976), it lacks their obsessive use of close-ups to convey ultimate angst and the use of dreams and fantasies on the protagonist's part to convey symbolically what the drama cannot.

Almost every commentator has subscribed to the viewpoint that *Manhattan* (1979), produced on the heels of *Interiors*, remains one of Allen's finest filmic achievements. Far from following a trend, as in Allen's parodies of James Bond-style films early in his career, or from producing hollow imitations of master filmmakers, *Manhattan* marks a bold and original stylistic leap forward. The use of lush, black-and-white cinematography recalls the glorious black-and-white images of the 1930s, aided here by the equally lush strains of Gershwin melodies. Combined with the widescreen process of CinemaScope, *Manhattan* stakes out new esthetic territory.[3] The film's cinematography and mise-en-scène are every bit as studied and composed as are *Interiors*, but without the lifelessness of the more overt drama. Allen reappears on screen in the role of Isaac Davis, a clear and undeniable stand-in for Allen himself and a clear return to comedy. With its plot of Isaac's breakup with Mary (Diane Keaton), *Manhattan* obviously recounts Allen's breakup with Keaton during the film's production.

Significantly, the film's title foregrounds its setting, rather than

the romantic components of the plot. Allen glorifies New York not only through the gorgeous cinematography that romanticizes the urban landscape, but also through voice-over. The film opens with a series of skyline shots, Allen's voice-over paying tribute to the city in a style that suggests film-noir. Using elegant shots of the Hayden Planetarium, he celebrates the city by showing how much there is to do in New York. He acknowledges the joys of city life by showing the variety of New York's inhabitants. For Allen, whose urban, Jewish neuroses often prevent coming to terms with his environment, New York represents home, as it does still for a large portion of American Jews. The city is the place of possibility, culture, and true inner life within urban (limited, but beautiful) exteriors.

Allen continually contrasts such an ideal with the compromises of personal integrity and the pitfall of succumbing to the quick, easy, and glib that also characterize contemporary urban life, with its overnight fads and forgettable fashions. New Yorkers in particular must appreciate the portrait of Yale (Michael Murphy, with whom Allen worked in *The Front*), who, instead of starting a small literary magazine, uses his money to buy a Porsche. Mary writes a novelization of a film; even Isaac has worked in television but retires to try and write a novel.

The Jewishness of Allen and of the milieu functions as a natural part of the environment, and, after ten years of filmmaking, Allen easily uses a shorthand to fill it in. We note the name *Isaac* as not only archetypally Jewish, but also referencing the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac. Can this biblical story of a son almost sacrificed in the name of religion possess some particular meaning for Allen? After all, we recall his humorous short story "The Scrolls" and note how the tale of Abraham and Isaac recurs again in *Stardust Memories*. This element of Jewishness, and of sacrifice, is humorously invoked when Isaac mentions one of his short stories, "The Castrating Zionist," which is about his mother not his father (psychoanalysis will not leave the scene). A section from his former wife's devastating critique of their marriage describes Isaac's "Jewish-Liberal paranoia." In a passing remark that subtly refers to the Holocaust, Isaac observes that the best way to deal with a group of neo-Nazis staging a march is not with satire but with bricks and bats. This is irony, or perhaps guilt, from a man whose greatest weapon has been comedy and satire, not physical violence. It also expresses the ambivalence of a man who would later be horrified at the use of bats on the part of Israeli soldiers dealing with the *intifada*.

The continuing absence of Judaism in *Manhattan* is also significant, as is the manner in which the existential Jew searches for a substitute. As Allen told an interviewer, "there's no center to the culture. We have this opulent relatively well-educated culture, and yet we see a great city like New York deteriorate. We see people lose themselves in drugs because they don't deal with their sense of spiritual emptiness" (quoted in Pogel 119). The substitute for absent Judaism and the resultant sense of spiritual emptiness are things Allen desperately tried to remedy in earlier films, which espouse only two cures: sex and death. To these two things, which come once in a lifetime, *Manhattan* proposes an addendum. This addendum at film's end is foreshadowed by Isaac's angry reaction to Yale and Mary, who denigrate many of his (and Allen's) cultural heroes: Lenny Bruce, Gustav Mahler, Vincent Van Gogh, and Ingmar Bergman. Later, after breaking up with Tracy (Mariel Hemingway), Isaac speaks into his tape recorder, enumerating the things that make life worth living: Groucho Marx, Willie Mays, Mozart's Jupiter Symphony, Flaubert's *A Sentimental Education*, and Tracy's face (see also Yacowar 201). Although in this list Tracy has become an esthetic object, a work of art or a commodified cultural icon, Isaac rushes across town to confront her. Thus, art and relationships make life worth living, as Isaac tries to salvage his relationship with Tracy. Tracy has the memorable, epigrammatic final line of the film, encapsulating Isaac's existential, spiritual quest and the moral lesson to be learned from it: "Look, you have to have a little faith in people."

Manhattan marked the clearest, fullest expression to date of how Allen wants to live his life. His continued willingness to confront his inner feelings and personal situations led to *Stardust Memories* (1980), a thinly disguised self-analysis in which Allen agonizes over his public role as a comic filmmaker and the place of his art in his life. Unfortunately, this deep introspection antagonized many fans and almost all of the film's critics. Yet a careful viewing that goes beyond Allen's apparent insults to loyal fans and the very act of film criticism shows Allen's clearest target to be himself. His most vicious barbs are directed inward. Once again, the Jew, who might be angry at the greater culture, misdirects his humor, victimizing himself. If *Zelig* is, in some sense, Allen's response to the attacks he received following the release of *Stardust Memories*, *Stardust Memories* can also be seen as a precursor to *Zelig*, a film that similarly focuses on a man with no personality, no meaning, of his own.

Set resolutely in the world of filmmaking, *Stardust Memories*

struck many critics simply as Allen's fruitless attempt to imitate Federico Fellini's *8½* (1963). Both films focus upon filmmakers during a professional crisis; both use a combination of memory and fantasy from their protagonist's point of view to take the audience through a retrospective of their creators' lives. Allen even uses the idea of a weekend retrospective screening of his alter ego's movies to structure his film, much as Fellini's alter ego rehearses and recollects his earlier movies. Of course, the professional crisis of the protagonists, their inability to know what their next film will be, becomes their next film, the film we are watching, a pattern of Fellini's that Paul Mazursky also borrowed for *Alex in Wonderland.*

Stardust Memories catalogs several of Allen's other recurring concerns, those fundamentally linked to his Jewishness. The connections between love and death, for example, are once again apparent. Sandy Bates (Allen) tells Dorrie (Charlotte Rampling): "I'm *fatally* attracted to you" (201; emphasis in Brode). Similarly, the death of love strikes Allen's protagonist: he is unable to sustain his relationship with Dorrie; his relationship with Daisy (Jessica Harper) seems to come to a quick halt; and his difficulty in committing to a relationship with a relatively sane and healthy woman hopelessly compromises his relationship with Isobel (Marie-Christine Barrault). Sandy, much like Isaac Davis in this respect, also resembles Isaac by having a successful show business career and by starting, if not sustaining, sexual relationships.

Allen overtly invokes Jewishness by naming a character in a film-within-the-film Sidney Finkelstein, as well as by making the character an archetypal *echt*-Jew whose fondest desire is to rid himself of his domineering mother. Jewishness also permeates the troubled relationship between Dorrie and Sandy. Viewers can quickly pigeonhole the anorectic Dorrie as another of Allen's dysfunctional WASP women whose family dynamics lead her to the same profound psychosis that permeates the daughters in *Interiors,* the daughter in *September,* and the professor and psychiatric patient in *Another Woman.* In addition to a disturbed, troubled mother, Allen also includes strong hints of father-daughter incest. Pogel notes that during one of the quarrels between Sandy and Dorrie, the walls of his apartment display blow-ups of a newspaper headline about incest (138).

Dorrie represents more than dysfunctional WASP psychology, however. She also symbolizes superior social class, a world of wealth and travel, of servants and spas, denied Sandy Bates until his own

success enables him to experience life's material gratifications. Allen neatly encapsulates these profound differences in psychology and social class in one moment of conversation. Sandy romanticizes the relationship with Dorrie's powerful, charismatic father and her institutionalized mother by juxtaposing it to his own upbringing: "Suicide was just not a middle-class alternative. My mother was too busy running the boiled chicken through the deflavorizing machine." He thus conflates social class and ethnicity. Only the rich kill themselves, he thinks, and only Jews serve flavorless boiled chicken. The brilliant comic conflation relies on the yoking of disparate realms that typifies Jewish humor and characterizes the best of Woody Allen's written and cinematic updating of the East European worldview.

The millenarian impulse, hinted at in *Sleeper,* parodied in *Love and Death,* and glimpsed in *Manhattan,* comes to the fore in *Stardust Memories.* But the cultural Jewishness of class and ethnicity represents just one aspect of Jewry that Allen brings up as he approaches Judaism (at least in passing) in a couple of key moments. Sandy's sister (Anne DeSalvo) reminisces to Isobel about the time Sandy protested against a school play based upon the biblical episode of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. Later, when aliens he imagines landing at a gathering of UFO believers berate Sandy for denying his comic gift and for his choice of women, he exclaims, "what are you, my rabbi?" By invoking Judaism within the context of UFOs and extraterrestrials, Allen admits people's metaphysical, millenarian impulses and rejects them explicitly. This scene in *Stardust Memories* draws much of its visual style from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind,* directed by Steven Spielberg, another Jew whose inability to believe in Judaism perhaps leads him to contemplate UFOs and extraterrestrials. Allen postulates that, at least for Sandy, his relationships with women (especially Dorrie) are substitutes for religion.

Juxtaposed against the millenarian impulse, and equally profound in Jewish culture, is the apocalyptic memory of Jewish history and religion. When a former friend from the old neighborhood bitterly compares his fate to Sandy's, the successful film director responds, "I was a lucky bum. If I was not born in Brooklyn, if I had been born in Poland, or Berlin, I'd be a lampshade today, right?" This overt invocation of the Holocaust, one of the few in Allen's cinema, in this context humanizes Sandy. We know that even if his worries about the universe are absurd, even if a viewing of *The Bicycle Thief* (1949) makes him feel guilty for making

comic films and for feeling sorry for comparing his situation to the economic struggles of De Sica's victimized Romans, he still expresses some legitimate, sensitive concerns.

The Holocaust is discussed more overtly in *Hannah and Her Sisters*. Frederick (Max von Sydow) tells Lee (Barbara Hershey) that he has just been watching a television program about the Holocaust. Incredulous at the continuing puzzlement expressed by intellectuals trying to understand how it could have happened, he contends that "these are the wrong questions. Given how people are what's surprising is not how it happened, but why it doesn't happen more often." Allen immediately undercuts this brilliantly pessimistic insight by having Frederick continue, superciliously claiming that it does happen but in smaller ways, thus removing Jewish specificity from the Holocaust. Worse, Frederick remains the film's most unsympathetic character, which lessens the effect of what he says and allows it to be attributed simply to his egocentric misanthropy. Yet in this one moment of conversation in *Stardust Memories,* Allen allows the issue of the Holocaust to come forward as part of a pattern, a mosaic, of a complex life that—whatever the situation—remains informed by being a Jew.[4]

One could easily dismiss *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* (1982) as a pleasant diversion following the complexities of *Stardust Memories.* Its retreat into an idealized rural setting, an idealized past, encourages one to see the film as Allen's attempt to leave aside his earlier, more depressing concerns. Having paid tribute to the urban exteriors of Manhattan, Allen now acknowledges something he only mocked or avoided previously: rural exteriors. Further, the change of setting and pace indicates Allen's desire to escape the soul-wrenching autobiography and equally intense criticism of *Stardust Memories.* In fact, between the release of *Stardust Memories* in 1980 and *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* in 1982, no Allen production whatsoever occurred; 1981 marked the only year since 1970 without a Woody Allen film. With *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy,* Allen, obviously drawing upon Shakespeare (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and Ingmar Bergman (*Smiles of a Summer Night,* 1955), produces a comic pastoral with an unexpectedly bucolic vision of the countryside from urban America's essential citizen.

The very setting of *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* reveals Allen's attempt to expunge Jewishness and thus comic anguish and self-criticism, at least for a while. So, too, the time period of 1906, when the majority of America's Jews were newly arrived and ghettoized, displaces Jewry almost entirely. Similarly, by eliminating the

WASP-Jew dichotomy, as seen in the very names chosen for the characters, Allen attempts to ignore Jewishness. Indeed, he solidifies the absence of Jewishness and Judaism by the rural setting, using shots of animals, and the spirit ball, which all create a pantheism to replace the absent Judaism. The only worthwhile pursuits are relationships and art, both the popular variety (the cinema) and high art as implied by the studied neo-Impressionistic compositions of the mise-en-scène and the muted colors (the film is in color unlike *Manhattan* and *Stardust Memories* and the predominate use of black and white in *Zelig* and *Broadway Danny Rose* that will follow it).

If in *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* Allen abandons the Jewish persona, along with the painful interiorization and self-accusation that being Jewish entails, if he tries to retreat from autobiography and evade critical scrutiny, *Zelig* (1983), a technically stunning story of a fictionalized celebrity of the 1920s who was a "chameleon man," returns Allen to the critical concern with self. *Zelig,* the clearest expression of Jewish fear and paranoia ever produced in the cinema, reveals a desperate desire to fit in and achieve total assimilation within mainstream society. Like many of his short stories, *Zelig* displays not only a particularly Jewish theme but also a particularly Jewish appeal. In an in-joke of American-Jewish intellectual life, Allen uses real-life "witnesses"—Irving Howe, Susan Sontag, Bruno Bettelheim, and Saul Bellow, all of whom sit firmly in the pantheon of the American-Jewish intelligentsia—to comment upon and participate in this fictional story of an archetypally Jewish character.

Zelig's theme relies upon a powerful paradox and also employs one of the more intriguing cinematic experiments of any mainstream American film. Allen constitutes much of the film in the black-and-white newsreel style of the 1930s, complete with sententious narration. He actually integrates the fictional characters into extant newsreel or other types of footage. Thus, scenes of Leonard Zelig and Dr. Eudora Fletcher (Mia Farrow) standing at Times Square in the 1920s, or of Zelig waiting in the batter's box behind Babe Ruth or frolicking with celebrities at Hearst's San Simeon, seem to be actual nonfictional footage. Mia Farrow is cast in the role of Dr. Fletcher in the black-and-white sections of the movie, while Ellen Garrison portrays the older Dr. Fletcher in the modern, color sections of the film. Allen uses both fictionalized characters to comment upon the fictional Zelig and well-known contemporary figures, identified as themselves, who also analyze Zelig. This daring erasure of the lines between fact and fiction, appropriately through

the medium of the cinema, which caused much confusion and dislocation among many of Allen's previous protagonists, is here used to comment upon the ambiguity of cinematic images in relating reality and constructing an image. It may thus be a comment upon the allegedly autobiographical nature of Allen's own films, an aspect that he takes pains to deny, even as he uses the stuff of his own life.

More daring is the film's meditation on celebrity, which is similarly reflective of Allen's own ambivalence about being a public figure. The picture is set during the jazz age and the depression, precisely when the motion picture industry solidified into a predominantly Jewish-owned studio system and became the first true mass medium. At the same time, the rise of radio, a second mass medium, contributed to the formation and development of the system of celebrity.

Although the setting for *Zelig* is critical for the technical gimmicks that Allen foregrounds (the integration of contemporary people into photographed scenes from the past), it remains equally important for a displaced meditation upon contemporary notions of celebrityhood. Allen uses the first generation of mass-mediated celebrity to comment upon the current obsession with celebrities. Celebrities are prized for their uniqueness and emulated by others, who wish they could be like these objects of worship and wonder. Movie critics, for example, write constantly about the unique persona, the special abilities, the one-of-a-kind attitude projected by movie stars or other celebrities. They cite charisma as the single most important attribute necessary for a movie star or celebrity. Yet Leonard Zelig possesses no charisma; he has no unique abilities, no persona. He evolves into a celebrity solely due to his ability to emulate other people. In a doubly ironic moment in the film, people on the street comment upon their wish to be more like Zelig, who merely takes on the characteristics of others.

The people whom Zelig becomes constitute one of Woody Allen's clearest ideological statements. Zelig typically transforms into a member of another ethnic or racial group, for example, Jews, similarly discriminated against. We learn, for example, that a Christian anti-Semitic radio program, "The Holy Family Christian Association," despises Zelig because he is a Jew who can disguise himself. Similarly, the Ku Klux Klan fears him as a triple threat: a Jew who can look like an Indian or a black. Early in the film Zelig metamorphosizes into an Italian and a black (a jazz trumpeter, perhaps recalling Allen's interest in the clarinet).

The first glimpse of the incredible changing man finds him as a Chinese in an opium den. Allen then extends Zelig's solidarity to include yet another group that is discriminated against: overweight people. Although the political aspect of change is tempting and something must be said for it, Zelig's transformations must be preeminently visible. His changes, his differences must be apparent. Thus, when he becomes less overtly ethnic, as when he turns into a Frenchman, Allen relies upon humorous stereotyping: beret and pencil-thin mustache. Later, when Zelig becomes a rabbi, he transforms into a Hasidic one because of the obvious visual components that such a persona entails. Thus, the idea of the visible underlies the most subtle joke in the film: a store advertises that it has pictures of Zelig as a Chinese, an overweight person, and an intellectual.

The most damning criticism of *Zelig* came, unsurprisingly, from a Jewish critic in a Jewish journal, *Commentary*. Richard Grenier noted that the origins of *Zelig* were not entirely fictional, that a real Zelig existed in the form of one Stephen Jacob Weinberg, who, however, took on roles of conspicuously high status. Critiquing Allen's film, Grenier wondered, "who, in the 20's, would have thrilled at the idea of a clever Brooklyn Jew managing to pass himself off as a Negro or a Chinese?" (62). Allen's shift of emphasis, then, adds to the idea of his political solidarity with repressed ethnic others. *Commentary*'s critic completely and (given the journal's conservatism of recent years) perhaps deliberately ignores this element of the film in a wrongheaded and obtuse criticism of it.

Yet if political solidarity with ethnic others is only subtlety situated in *Zelig*, Allen's incorporation of Jewishness is not. The Jewishness of Leonard Zelig, stated outright, links him directly to his creator, Woody Allen, further intensifying the authorial or autobiographical links between character and creator as well as the influence of Jewishness on both. Leonard Zelig is the son of a failed Yiddish actor named Morris Zelig, "whose performance as Puck in the Orthodox version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was coolly received." The humor of this wonderfully complex allusion resides in the audience's ability to reference a number of allusive levels. First, Allen based his immediate filmic predecessor to *Zelig* largely on *A Midsummer Night's Dream;* it, too, was "coolly received" (Pogel 175). More significantly, the once-popular Yiddish theater in New York notoriously "borrowed" other texts for its own purposes, Shakespeare included. *The Yiddish King Lear,* for example, was one of the most popular of these intertextual reworkings.[5] Finally, the notion

of an "Orthodox" version of a Yiddish drama plays on the strands within Judaism—Orthodox, Conservative, Reform—and not within the secular Yiddish theater.

From the Yiddish theater background of the Zeligs, Allen moves to the urban environment. We learn that, although the Zeligs lived above a bowling alley, it was the bowling alley that complained of noise. This recalls the apartment house of Alvy Singer's youth in *Annie Hall,* situated below the giant roller coaster at Coney Island, although visually the Zeligs' neighborhood appears nearly identical to that of the Starkwells in *Take the Money and Run.* The anti-Semitic bullying meted out to Leonard similarly resembles Virgil's childhood. Whereas anti-Semitism could only be inferred from the earlier picture, however, Allen makes it explicit in *Zelig.* In fact, even Leonard's parents are complicit in the anti-Semitic bullying, a self-conscious recognition of the mechanism of Jewish self-hatred. Later in life, his sister, Ruth, and her domineering husband exploit Leonard horribly by exhibiting him at a sideshow.[6]

If his parents and family fail Zelig, then religion—Judaism—fares no better. As he recalls, "I'm 12 years old. I run into a synagogue and ask the rabbi the meaning of life. But he tells it to me in Hebrew. I don't understand Hebrew; he wants to charge me $600 for Hebrew lessons." Such a seemingly absurd situation speaks to numerous aspects of the American-Jewish experience, including the money-grubbing stereotype, the mystical confusions of Judaism, and the bemusement of young people attending Hebrew school amid their otherwise secular education and lives. The comedy that Allen finds in Judaism recurs in Zelig's transformation into a Hasidic rabbi (as he earlier "transformed" in *Take the Money and Run* and *Annie Hall*). In this instance, however, Allen again references anti-Semitism; the narrator says that "his transformation into a rabbi suggests to certain Frenchmen that he be sent to Devil's Island," quickly recalling the notorious Dreyfus affair.

If Judaism failed him, however, a particularly virulent form of anti-Semitism—self-hatred—almost destroys him. The link between self-hatred and anti-Semitism is most shocking when Zelig transforms into a major member of the Nazi party. Although awesome technical brilliance reveals the tiny figure of Leonard Zelig on the dais behind and screen right of the ranting and raving Adolph Hitler, the image of the little Jew, now an active member of the group that sought to annihilate his people, is mesmerizing. By this cinematic, even cultural, yoking of opposites Allen illuminates the tragedy of German Jews trying to assimilate into a mainstream

society that viewed them as enemies and outsiders to be slaughtered. No visual, behavioral, or attitudinal amount of conformity, real or imagined, saved the Jews nor, Allen likely notes, would it save them in the future.

Zelig is thus an important demonstration of the mechanism of self-hatred revealed by Allen himself, particularly as an artist who simultaneously makes fun of Jewish culture and religion while he reveals the tragic consequences of its underlying anti-Semitism. That *Zelig* relates, therefore, an essentially Jewish story is stated overtly in the film by Irving Howe: "When I think about it, it seems to me that his story reflected a lot of the Jewish experience in America; the great urge to push in, and to find one's place and then to assimilate into the culture." Before saying this, Howe, previously identified only by his name, is further identified as the author of *World of Our Fathers,* the classic text about the Jewish experience on the Lower East Side. Zelig's background, of course, is precisely this Lower East Side, and he is a product of this "world of our fathers."

Zelig's desire to conform, to "assimilate like mad" as Howe says, stems from Jewish fears of prejudice and feelings of inferiority. Under hypnosis, Zelig reveals to Dr. Fletcher that he metamorphoses because "it's safe" and "I want to be liked." The first sentiment reveals fear, the second inferiority. Why is it dangerous to be different, and why would one not be liked if one is different? The answers to these questions, unfortunately, remain obvious, especially to Jews, in particular those who lived during the 1920s and 1930s when the film is set. Zelig first experienced feelings of inferiority at school, when some very bright people had read *Moby-Dick* but he had not. The choice of *Moby-Dick* is complex. Robert Stam notes the four separate occasions in *Zelig* when Allen references *Moby-Dick.* He concludes that perhaps the use of Melville's novel points "reflexively to certain features of the Allen film, since *Zelig*'s own generic tapestry recalls the dense textual interweave of *Moby-Dick* (*Subversive Pleasures* 208).

The allusion can also be seen as reflecting Jews' sense of alienation from mainstream culture. To push this a bit further, *Moby-Dick* represents the ultimate American text, reflecting not just the high cultural standards that alienate Jews, but the all-Americanness of the novel's concerns: male-bonding, adventure, and the conquering of a wilderness. For that matter, it might be that *Moby-Dick* represents an essentially Christian allegory from which Jews remain similarly alienated. Yet Allen attempts to establish a rapport between Zelig and the audience, perhaps similarly conflicted over

their own intellectual and cultural identities. *Moby-Dick*, after all, symbolizes other books that are well known yet little read.

If Zelig experiences the fear of inferiority when he is ashamed of not having read *Moby-Dick*, he experiences the fear of difference when he enters a bar on St. Patrick's Day. This, we learn, is the first occasion of his metamorphosis: "My hair turned red, my nose turned up . . . began talking about the great potato famine." Zelig's transformation from one ethnic type to another is apparent immediately, and we see how the Irish, established in New York before the Jews and traditionally both proud and militant about their heritage, provide an implicit model of ethnicity that self-hating, assimilating Jews might better emulate.[7]

It is not ethnicity, Jewish or otherwise, that provides Zelig's ultimate redemption, however. Once again, in typical Allen fashion, salvation comes through love and the attempt to sustain a relationship. Yet redemption, at least at first, seems to come from another type of Judaic substitute, psychoanalysis. Zelig's condition, which Dr. Fletcher determines to be psychological, allows a glimpse into the psychoanalytic process, the talking cure. At their first meeting, Fletcher watches Zelig become a psychiatrist but not a woman. This provides the occasion for the first of many jokes at psychiatry's expense, familiar territory to Allen's aficionados. "Dr." Zelig proclaims that he studied on the Continent with Freud, but broke with him over the concept of penis envy—"Freud thought it should be limited to women." Later he claims to be treating four sets of schizophrenic Siamese twins, thus collecting fees from sixteen patients. The self-deprecation and feelings of inferiority that Allen expressed so memorably in his early films here return as Zelig whines about his need to get uptown, where he teaches a course in advanced masturbation. If he is late, the class starts without him. Yet for all the apparently psychoanalytic situations, nothing other than the love of a good woman and a few weeks in the country cures Zelig.

Although Allen provides a happy ending, he immediately undercuts it with a bittersweet coda.[8] Although Leonard and Eudora lived happily together, Leonard then died. Dr. Fletcher is still quite alive and not especially old in the present-day, color, sections of the film. More than that, we learn that Zelig's only regret about dying was not getting a chance to finish reading *Moby-Dick*, which he has just started. This coda, this anhedonic inability to enjoy life, separates Allen's vision of relationships from the simplistic redemption of best-selling novels and popular films. Even cured, even with the

love of a woman and a life of contentment, the little Jew still possesses that lingering doubt that he is not quite good enough.

"Not quite good enough" similarly describes both the character of a theatrical agent portrayed by Allen in his next film and the clients his character represents. *Broadway Danny Rose* (1984), one of Allen's least autobiographical films, is one of his most affectionate.[9] Perhaps its marginally autobiographical element allows Allen to permit his affection for life's little losers to shine through. Certainly, the film relates to *Manhattan* because it shares the earlier picture's fondness for New York cityscapes, again photographed in black and white although deglamorized. Whereas *Manhattan* foregrounded New York by its very title, the city in this film recedes into the background; in fact, only Broadway is seen. *Broadway Danny Rose* belies the mythic and romantic implications of Broadway and becomes Allen's tribute to a slightly darker, much less glamorous side of show business. In a sense, *Broadway Danny Rose* is an alternative autobiography of Woody Allen, the story of what Allen's own show business career might have been but for the grace of God and a few lucky breaks. It is thus one of Allen's most overtly Jewish films.

Allen implicates the world of Broadway, his alternate autobiography, and of the Jewish milieu that dominates these worlds in the very first sequence of the film. A long-shot outside the Carnegie Delicatessen firmly establishes physical place and cultural milieu. Once inside the restaurant, the camera casually "overhears" two comics discussing their craft, one complaining that his old-standby Miami joke did not work the other night. Shortly thereafter, a group of seven comics again complains about the continuing decline of New York clubs. One (Will Jordan) speaks of how he came to be an impressionist and launches into a fine imitation of James Mason. The comics also begin to reminisce about the "Ed Sullivan Show" and mention Danny Rose.

In this world, nightclub comics hustle to make a living playing clubs; it is a world of old jokes borrowed, stolen, told, and retold. We later see many of Danny Rose's own clients, who occupy a lower rung on the show business ladder of success than the comics (Corbett Monica, Morty Gunty, and Sandy Barron) who sit swapping stories. Danny's pitiful clients include a blind xylophone player, a one-armed juggler, a singing bird act, and a husband-and-wife balloon-folding team. We even glimpse Danny Rose as a comic, precisely the kind of performer who horrified Allen's alter ego Alvy Singer in *Annie Hall* when he was asked to sell jokes to him.

Woody Allen's small-time theatrical agent Danny Rose proudly wears his Jewishness for all to see: here, a *chai* around his neck.

Woody Allen himself, of course, played nightclubs, college campuses (as he humorously tells his balloon-folding act they someday will), and appeared on the "Ed Sullivan Show." Had he less talent as a writer or less interest in filmmaking, Allen would perhaps still be struggling to make a living telling jokes to old Jewish people in the Catskill Mountains or Miami Beach. He would certainly be among the faded comics at the deli. For this reason, Allen uses Milton Berle, the apotheosis of success in old Jewish show business, as the ultimate triumph of Danny's only successful client, Lou Canova.

On a number of occasions Allen clearly implicates the Jewishness of the audience as well as the Jewishness of the comics. Early in the film, Danny desperately tries to book an act, any act, at Weinstein's Majestic Bungalow Colony (the New York Jews in the audience can be separated from the rest of the audience by the laughs this name evokes). Weinstein complains that old Jews do not want to see a blind xylophone player or a one-armed juggler. Danny then suggests Eddie Clark's penguin, who skates onto the stage dressed like a rabbi (more evidence that Allen views the appearance of rabbis as humorous). Later we learn that a hypnotist whom Danny handles has put a woman into a trance and cannot get her out. As the husband desperately berates the hypnotist in Yiddish, Danny tries to calm him by saying that if the wife does not awaken, he will take the man to a Chinese restaurant. For Jewish New Yorkers, especially displaced ones, the throw-away line is a vivid reminder of home.

The most Jewish aspect to the film, however, is Danny Rose himself. Allen's own Jewishness has always been overt, an inherent part of the persona he has created and shaped throughout his career. Here, however, he makes ethnicity even more obvious. Danny Rose, for example, wears a *chai* necklace, a well-chosen Jewish symbol for the character. A Star of David would have made his religious affiliation as clear, but the symbolism of the *chai* would be lacking. Against all odds and circumstances, Danny believes in life, the meaning of the Hebrew letter *chai*. He has learned a lesson from *Manhattan*'s Tracy; as the narrator Sandy Barron says, although Lou Canova was an overweight, washed-up alcoholic, "Danny has faith." On a number of occasions Danny exclaims, "*Emmis* [truth], my hand to God."

Danny's own Jewishness is further instilled by the deceased family he forever invokes to make a point. We hear of Aunt Rose,[10] Uncle Menachem, Uncle Morris, Uncle Sidney, Cousin Ceil (Ceil will also be the name of one of the young hero's Jewish aunts in

Radio Days), and Uncle Meyer. He describes his female relatives in the most unflattering terms: Aunt Rose looks like something you could buy in a live bait store, and Cousin Ceil like something in the reptile house at the zoo. These remnants of anti-Semitism and self-hatred spring from the self-deprecation of Allen's schlemiel persona, resurrected for this film.

Danny Rose bases his philosophy of life upon guilt and love. Although Woody Allen occasionally makes fun of the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur (for example, in *Annie Hall* and *Radio Days*), Danny Rose understands the source of guilt. "Guilt is important," he tells Tina (Mia Farrow), whose own philosophy of life Danny compares to the screenplay for *Murder, Incorporated*. Guilt prevents us from committing otherwise horrible acts, and so a lack of guilt, a lack of some religious faith, leads to a horrible act—murder—in *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. "I'm guilty all the time," he continues, "and I never did anything." When Tina asks if he believes in God, Danny replies, "No, but I feel guilty about it!" To balance one's own sense of guilt requires a generosity of spirit toward others. Danny subscribes to his Uncle Sidney's philosophy in this matter: "Acceptance, forgiveness, and love." The concept of guilt comes alive for Danny when, horrified, he learns that the Rispoli brothers have badly beaten Barney Dunn after being told by Danny that Barney is Tina's lover, thinking the stuttering ventriloquist to be out of town entertaining on a cruise ship. Danny must make amends to Barney, and he does so by representing him as his agent.

Danny's admirable philosophy of life, however, never leads him to financial success. No more skilled as a theatrical manager than as a comedian, Danny's clients leave him behind as soon as they achieve even a modicum of success. Instead of interpreting this as his problem, or even as a failure in other people, Danny theorizes that people want to reject their earlier years, rewrite them, and deny their origins. Allen himself often speaks harshly about his own background, his family, his childhood, and his early days in show business, yet he never denies them. Danny's outlook on life leaves him a financial loser, but he emerges a winner in matters of the heart. By film's end, he has Tina, who originally tells Danny that his apartment looks like a loser lives there. Danny and Tina represent different philosophies of life, however Tina eventually moves over to Danny's position, even quoting back to him Uncle Sidney's watchwords, "acceptance, forgiveness, and love."

Douglas Brode maintains that *Broadway Danny Rose* "could be subtitled 'The Education of Tina,' since it is about her growing consciousness; the way she becomes worthy of Danny" (240). In this respect the film reproduces Allen's recurring motif of the shiksa's education by the Jewish man, as seen particularly in *Sleeper, Annie Hall,* and *Manhattan*. The Jewish man teaches his shiksa about the darker side of life, about guilt, death, and the need for love in a harsh world.

A harsh world is exactly the description of the environment of *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), the follow-up to *Broadway Danny Rose*. This film presents a far darker and demythologizing view of show business than the previous work yet paradoxically makes even stronger the power and importance of the cinema, which becomes a crucial component in a dark and cruel world to compensate for the absence of Judaism. *The Purple Rose of Cairo* marks Allen's strongest statement on how the cinema replaces religion as a moral and ethical teacher. Both implicitly in cinematic parodies and explicitly in such films as *Play It Again, Sam, Manhattan,* and *Stardust Memories,* Allen uses the cinema to posit a model of how to act and how to provide a meaning to relationships. *The Purple Rose of Cairo* makes the religious dimension of the cinema overt. In addition, the relationship component becomes a function of the cinema in this story of a woman who worships the cinema and falls in love with a character who literally comes out of a movie.

Allen clearly links *The Purple Rose of Cairo* to *Play It Again, Sam,* with some important distinctions. In the earlier film, the protagonist conjured up a figure out of film (Bogart) to teach him about relationships, whereas in this film a figure steps out of a film to relate to the protagonist. Allen's 1985 film is linked to his own, earlier short story "The Kugelmass Episode," in which a character first steps into the world of *Madame Bovary* to relate to, and have relations with, the novel's protagonist. The couple then enters the real world. Similarly, Allen's film owes a debt to Buster Keaton's 1924 silent classic *Sherlock Junior,* except in Keaton's film a character walks into a movie and in Allen's a character walks out of a movie. In both films, however, the implications of these impossible acts are not ignored. Even in "The Kugelmass Episode," the consequences of the hero's actions are apparent; students in classrooms all over the country wonder, "Who is this character on page 100? A bald Jew is kissing Madame Bovary?" (*Side Effects* 67). When Keaton's protagonist enters a film, he becomes subjected to the laws of cinema in one of filmdom's most inspiring and brilliant montages. When Allen's filmic protagonist emerges into the real world, its alien laws provide a good deal of humor about the differences

between reel and real life, a motif Allen often uses in his earlier films. The most amusing of these dislocations is the shocked look on film character Tom Baxter's (Jeff Daniels) face when Cecilia (Mia Farrow) tells him about babies and childbirth.

Yet Allen cannot resist a few jibes at the world of movies, especially the people who work in it. Cecilia ingenuously chides actor Gil Shepherd for claiming he created the character of Tom Baxter. "Didn't the writer do that?" she innocently wonders. Gil is easily diverted from getting Tom Baxter back into the movie whenever Cecilia begins to talk about Gil's acting talent. Although it is a cliché to say that actors are egotists, in this film at least the actor is compared to the character he creates. Equally clichéd, perhaps, is Gil's betrayal of Cecilia. He promises to take her back to Hollywood with him if she rejects Tom Baxter, thereby forcing him back onto the screen. After doing so, Cecilia learns that Gil returned to Hollywood immediately. Yet if actors' egos are large, so, too, are many of the characters'. After Tom leaves the film for the real world, the other characters begin to talk about how the film revolves around them individually. Here Allen demonstrates that there truly are no small roles, only small actors.

Allen also remembers that the classic Hollywood of 1935, of the major studios like RKO, the distributor of the (fictional) film-within-the-film *The Purple Rose of Cairo,* was Jewish. The name *Raoul Hirsch* is an amusing tribute to the Jewishness of the old Hollywood, but the fictional screenwriters Irving Sachs and R. H. Levine also make the same point.[11] Allen compares the Jewishness of the Old Hollywood to the Jewishness of the Old Testament, as *The Purple Rose of Cairo* makes most explicit his earlier links between the cinema and religion.[12] As word gets out, for example, that Tom Baxter has left the movie and entered life, a reporter shouts, "it's a miracle!" Near the end of the film, Tom asks the on-screen priest to marry real-life Cecilia to fictional Tom. When Gil complains about the legality of this, the priest angrily responds, "the Bible never says a priest can't be on film." In the most complex establishing link between cinema and religion, Cecilia takes Tom to a church and begins to speak of God, "the reason for everything . . . the universe." For Tom, God is understandable: "The two men who wrote *The Purple Rose of Cairo,* Irving Sachs and R. H. Levine." This is not only a complex joke about Tom's limited perceptions, but also a metaphysical allusion to the artist, significantly, the screenwriter, as prime creator. In addition, it is the second insistence in the film on the primacy of the writer. Because Woody Allen wrote the film (that

is, *The Purple Rose of Cairo,* which features Tom Baxter, and *The Purple Rose of Cairo,* which contains Baxter's film within it), it contains another allusion to Allen's own identification with God, stated previously in *Manhattan* and *Stardust Memories.* He even manages to allude quite clearly to the importance of movie-going as ritual; like religion, the movies engender a familiar, repetitive pattern that bespeaks a timeless transcendence. As a woman patron who objects to the idea of a character leaving the film states, "I want what happened in the movie last week to happen this week. Otherwise what's life all about anyway?"

If *The Purple Rose of Cairo* demonstrates the developing faith in the cinema as a means of transcendence, then *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986) marks a significant step in the evolution of Allen's attempt to mediate the binary conflicts between Jew and WASP, neurosis and psychosis, and self-hate and self-respect. Here, Allen appears in a predominantly serious film that uses the same basic structure as *Interiors:* three sisters in a dysfunctional family with a powerful, attractive father and mother, both of whom have emotional problems. As in *Interiors,* the sisters are at loose ends and jealous of each other. The middle sister, Holly (Diane Wiest), desperately seeks romance and a career and initially fails at both. Lee (Barbara Hershey), the youngest and a recovering alcoholic, involves herself in a dissatisfying relationship with a much older man (Max von Sydow) and then in an affair with Hannah's husband, Elliot (Michael Caine).

Unlike *Interiors,* however, *Hannah and Her Sisters* features Allen as a major character. To an extent, the film mediates its dramatic and comic elements, with Allen taking most of the comic sequences and the WASP family bearing the dramatic intensity. Structurally, therefore, Allen splits the film along the lines of WASP drama–Jew comedy. Allen portrays Mickey, another of his lovable losers and a schlemiel despite his success as a television producer, the former husband of the major character, Hannah (Mia Farrow). If a bit grotesque and a painfully comic caricature of a Jewish hypochondriac, Mickey still remains the focus of the film's major thematic moment, the recipient of a transcendent experience. Although he relegates the bulk of the film's comedy to this Jewish outsider, Allen also saves its most heartwarming, life-affirming moments for his Jewish persona.

The film also segments its WASP drama–Jew comedy along philosophical lines, perhaps expressed as an opposition between metaphysics and physics, between mental musings and physical cou-

plings. Ultimately, Allen solves the metaphysical via the physical (and the esthetic), but until doing so he splits the film by the religio-philosophical musings of Mickey versus the physical, romantic intertwinings of Elliot, Lee, Hannah, and Holly. Two juxtaposed sequences make this clear. The first begins with an aphorism from Tolstoy: "The only absolute knowledge attainable by man is that life is meaningless." Mickey, via a voice-over, despairs of ever finding the meaning of life, especially if the great minds of the past have been unsuccessful. The humor of this sequence provides yet another example of the yoking of disparate realms, the sudden thrusting downward from sacred to mundane. Mickey quotes Nietzsche about the eternal recurrence of life, which depresses him because "I'll have to sit through the Ice Capades again." Juxtaposed to Mickey's musings, Allen places a sequence entitled "Afternoons" that contains only two scenes. The first features Elliot and Lee enjoying (except insofar as they are racked by guilt) an afternoon tryst at a hotel; the second accentuates Elliot with Hannah, as he agonizes over his treatment of her and she desperately tries to communicate with him. Thus the characters are segregated in their disparate realms.

However, this seemingly precise separation of comedy and drama, the metaphysical from the physical, Jew from WASP, seems more apparent than real. Although Mickey stands apart from the drama surrounding Hannah and her sisters, he had a relationship with Hannah and eventually establishes one with Holly. Further, in sequences that focus upon Mickey, Allen often integrates other characters in significant and interesting ways. "The Abyss," a sequence in the middle of the film (before the Tolstoyan despair), introduces the audience to Mickey's existential crisis. Upon learning that he does not have a brain tumor, he is plunged into doubt, desperate to find meaning in a life that eventually and inevitably will end. As Mickey ruminates about doing something drastic, Allen cuts to Elliot and Lee in a hotel room, making love for the first time. They are plunged into their own abyss, although one involving sex and guilt. A sequence late in the film, "Summer in New York," finds Elliot still agonizing over his inability to break away from Hannah or end his relationship to Lee, and Mickey discussing the meaning of life with a Hare Krishna acolyte. Both Jew and WASP, in their own private abysses, await a spark of meaning or insight.

The real links in the film between Jew and WASP, between metaphysical and physical, are forged by Mickey and Holly. At the end

of the sequence introduced by the caption "the anxiety of the man in the booth"—a deliberate reference to Robert Shaw's play *The Man in the Glass Booth,* which has the Holocaust as a theme—Mickey remarks that "love is really unpredictable." Then the scene cuts to a scene onstage at the opera. Instinctively, the audience takes the opera to be an ironic commentary on the hyperactive, melodramatic musings of the hypochondriacal Mickey, perhaps as Allen uses Hollywood films to comment on his characters in *Crimes and Misdemeanors.* However, the architect, David (Sam Waterston), and Holly watch the opera from David's box at the Met. It is then clear that love—in the triangle of David-Holly-April—is unpredictable, because Holly agonizes over whether David prefers April to her. Retrospectively, however, we remember Allen foreshadowing love's unpredictability by linking Mickey with Holly in this subtle way. Later, he reestablishes the link between Mickey and Holly at the end of the sequence that began with the grim epigram from Tolstoy.

As Mickey muses that "maybe love is the only answer," he remembers a date he had with Holly. Although the date was horrible, they establish a relationship in the film's present. The relationship comes to fruition in the sequence "Lucky I ran into you," in which Holly bravely asks Mickey to read a script she has written. Mickey's admiration for the script brings them together again. With the song "You Made Me Love You" in the background, their eventual union seems inevitable. Yet this, too, has been preceded by another juxtaposition within an earlier sequence, "The big leap," which is memorable and hilarious.

The big leap primarily refers to Mickey who, searching for meaning and significance, explores the possibility of converting to Catholicism. Allen foreshadows the Catholicism in this sequence by earlier using comedy that is rare for him: antireligious humor that is not directed at Judaism. Although he is quite willing to poke fun at Judaism, he does not make jokes at the expense of other religions until early in *Hannah and Her Sisters.* Mickey, introduced in the sequence entitled "The Hypochondriac," is seen backstage as the producer of a television show similar to "Saturday Night Live." A network censor, come to complain about a sketch dealing with child abuse, claims that such a skit is unusable because it names names. This is not so, Mickey retorts, the sketch just refers to the pope! A short while later, Mickey's assistant (Julie Kavner) suggests substituting a sketch used earlier: "the Cardinal Spellman–Ronald Reagan Homosexual Dance Number."

It is hard to know if Allen sees this as funny for its own sake, or if

he satirizes what passes for satire on contemporary American television. It is equally possible that he recalls an earlier, frustrating experience of his own: a show entitled "The Politics of Woody Allen" (1971), which PBS produced but never aired. One of its bits involved a nun commenting on the Allen character's sexual prowess by noting, "he's an unbelievable swinger, a freak" (quoted in Yacowar 104). Allen mitigates such jokes at the expense of Catholicism by a reverential treatment of Mickey's thoughts of conversion. Mickey goes to St. Patrick's Cathedral and watches respectfully as liturgical music pulsates in the background. Yet he also passes a store window that displays a picture of Jesus, whose eyes seem to open and shut as one shifts perspective. This example of Catholic kitsch at least indicates that Mickey (and Allen himself) seems unlikely to find purpose or affirmation in such a well-merchandised realm.

That Mickey thinks of converting to Catholicism becomes important and a fact that some audiences, perhaps, will not appreciate. After all, Allen never mentions the word *Jew* until the "big leap" sequence. That we recognize Mickey's Jewishness all along (and, in fact, take it for granted) is a function of codes: he is Woody Allen, a hypochondriac, and in some ways still the lovable schlemiel. To make this clear to all audiences, Allen has Mickey visit his parents, who question why someone raised as a Jew would want to become a Catholic. His mother slams her bedroom door in despair, and his father, Max, tries to reason with him. Mickey's father represents Jews who are not neurotic, questing, and intellectual like Mickey, but hard-headed, practical, and entirely down-to-earth. He wonders "who thinks about such nonsense" that concerns his son. When Mickey says that he needs to know how evil can exist, how, for example, could God have allowed the Nazis, his father, exasperated, responds, "how the hell do I know why there were Nazis. I don't know how the can opener works!"

This exchange represents yet another example of yoking disparate realms, thrusting the audience suddenly downward from the metaphysical to the mundane. From here, Allen cuts to Mickey entering his apartment and unpacking some Catholic "supplies" he has just bought: a crucifix, a picture of Jesus, Wonder Bread, and mayonnaise. Astute audiences appreciate how Wonder Bread and mayonnaise can be "Catholic," as the mangled Yiddish in *Sleeper,* or Annie Hall ordering a pastrami on white with mayonnaise and lettuce are matters of recognizing the cultural and ethnic codes at work in the humor. Of course, such things are not Catholic so much

as they are goyish, and by their very goyishness it becomes clear that the answers to Mickey's question reside neither in Catholicism nor in any other religious system of belief. Although he gives up the idea of converting, Mickey still searches for real answers, and soon questions a Hare Krishna.

Although we appreciate the humor of Mickey's big leap, the sequence does not end with him, but rather moves to Hannah and her sisters at lunch. Holly, too, undertakes a big leap: she decides to abandon acting for writing. Both she and Mickey contemplate changes in their lives, another of the links that foreshadow their eventual union. Holly's big leap into writing is successful; Mickey's into Catholicism fails to solve his metaphysical problem. His dilemma is finally solved in the "Lucky I ran into you" sequence, in which he comes to an accommodation with life, accepting and living with its built-in limitations. As he tells Holly, he overcomes his crisis at the movies.

At his lowest ebb, Mickey seeks refuge in the comforting darkness of a movie theater. While the Marx Brothers cavort on screen in *Duck Soup* (1932), Mickey experiences an epiphany that allows him to accommodate the complexities, ambiguities, and evils of life. Here Allen again asserts the power of the cinema to endow life with meaning, this time in homage to one of his screen idols, Groucho Marx, to whom he also pays tribute at the start of *Annie Hall.* At the movies, Mickey finds the power of art and the sense of fun that enable him to continue to live in spite of his knowledge of the inevitable.

Mickey's revelation comes perilously close to a similar sequence in another Hollywood comedy, Preston Sturges's *Sullivan's Travels* (1941). Sturges's autobiographical stand-in, the film director John Sullivan (Joel McCrea), finds no satisfaction from making comedies. Like Allen's Sandy Bates of *Stardust Memories,* he agonizes about continuing to produce comedies in an increasingly dark world. Sullivan learns the lesson that comedy is good, when, as part of a prison chain gang, he watches a cartoon in a church. Hearing the raucous laughter of the impoverished church-goers and hardened, abused criminals, Sullivan is struck by the importance of laughter and the escape that it brings from everyday life. He can return to Hollywood and make comedies rather than pompous dramas about social situations and poverty.

Allen's point avoids the simplistic and self-serving message of Sturges because he makes no claims for the cinema's role in society. Further, Mickey's revelation represents merely the initial phase re-

quired for his redemption, for his transcendence of life's emptiness. He still requires Holly, demonstrating that romance, love, and relationships remain equally as important as the movies. Only after coming to terms with life and establishing a new relationship can Mickey be a real father (his children with Hannah are the result of artificial insemination). Holly announces her pregnancy at film's end, the third Thanksgiving of the picture, and Mickey can partake at last in this most important secular celebration.

The conflicts and contradictions that suffuse Allen's work reappear significantly and interestingly in *Radio Days* (1987). A follow-up to *Hannah,* the film is a seemingly affectionate tribute to his childhood and the meaning that radio had in Allen's life and that of his family's. On the one hand, *Radio Days* marks another of the films in which Allen is absent and is his first such film that does not focus primarily upon a woman. On the other hand, he is heard offscreen, in voice-over narration, throughout the film. This voice-over narrator, never named as Woody Allen, corresponds to a youngster, Joe (Seth Green), whom we do see and who is, obviously, not Woody Allen (nor named Woody Allen, although he looks like he will grow up to be Woody Allen). Yet the voice-over seems to be Allen's and is heard even before anything is seen. Thus, Allen modulates the film between a genuine autobiography, the tales of a real radio raconteur appropriately heard but not seen, and another of the thinly disguised fictions in his filmic canon.

The film's time frame is deliberately compressed and vague, as is memory. Although set in the early days of World War II, much of the film clearly takes place sometime before the war; for example, Joe, Aunt Bea (Diane Wiest), and her date see *The Philadelphia Story* (1940) at Radio City Music Hall, and one of Aunt Bea's dates abandons her on a highway when he becomes frightened by the infamous "War of the Worlds" broadcast of 1938. The film, again structured by alternating sequences (this time between the world of radio and the world of the family), represents another variation of WASP versus Jew. Although show business is a very Jewish business, here Allen codes it as WASP. For example, he segregates Mia Farrow—so to speak—from the Jews, as she occupies a place in the world of radio and never interacts with the family. Allen offers behind-the-scenes glimpses of radio programming under the guise of telling some of the radio stories collected over the years. He also provides scenes of family and neighborhood life to demonstrate clearly the meaning of radio to the family.

In *Radio Days,* the radio is the realm of fantasy, the world of

hopes and dreams; it even assumes a religious aura. Allen explicitly contrasts the glamorous world of the radio stars to the drab life of the family. "Breakfast with Irene and Roger," for example, is contrasted to breakfast at the household (the family's last name is never given), much to the detriment of the latter. The world is structured of binary opposites: fantasy-reality, high (radio)-low (family), and sacred-mundane in yet another film that demonstrates the importance of popular art in ordinary life. Of course, part of Allen's strategy reveals the hollowness, shallowness, and phoniness of the radio (and, by implication, film) side of things. At the same time, he attempts to show the family as loving, sympathetic, nostalgic, and real. Regardless of the reality behind the radio, however, it allows the family members their moments of quiet transcendence.

Radio Days, in many ways, represents quite a daring, even risky, foray into Jewishness. Its portrait of class and ethnicity are far in excess of anything Allen has shown previously. Where Allen only covertly coded as Jewish the lower-middle-class background of Virgil Starkwell in *Take the Money and Run,* or merely glimpsed Alvy Singer's Jewish milieu in *Annie Hall,* or Sandy Bates's similar background in *Stardust Memories, Radio Days* immerses the audience in the dilapidated row houses of neighborhood New York. Constant worries and bickering about money might be played for laughs, but no one who lived through the depression or grew up only one generation removed from the ghetto can fault the accuracy of Allen's memories. Similarly, the fact that Uncle Abe (Josh Mostel) brings home fish night after night might have its humorous component, but the nutritional value of fish sustained many Jewish families during difficult times.

To this portrait of an extended family barely getting by, Allen adds one of the neighborhood, with the Commies on one side of the family and the Waldbaums, with whom they share a telephone line, on the other. Of course, the eternally snooping yenta lives across the street. And one day Mr. Zipsky from down the block runs amok, brandishing a meat cleaver while he runs down the street in his underwear.[13] Along with the component of economic class, impressively and accurately realized in *Radio Days,* Allen's foregrounding of the component of ethnicity, of Jewishness, becomes more problematic. In particular, two extended sequences make these portrayals of Judaism almost anathema to the Jewish community. The scenes should be seen as the images of the family members themselves—as ultimately either truthful or loving (if not both)—in order not to condemn the film as anti-Semitic.

The extended family of *Radio Days*.

The first scene involves Joe, who desires a Masked Avenger secret compartment ring. In order to pay for it, he steals the money he ostensibly collects "for a Jewish homeland in Palestine." The youngster tells his friends that Palestine means nothing to him, so he might as well use the money for the ring and some ice cream. The idea of stealing money intended to build a Jewish homeland, Israel, certainly verges on the sacrilegious; Israel is the secular religion of American Jewry (hence the furor over Allen's condemnation of Israel discussed earlier). To this already sacrilegious act Allen adds the rabbi's shocked reaction to little Joe's thievery. The rabbi, who teaches at the Hebrew school in the neighborhood, calls in Joe and his parents to inform them of their son's horrific theft. When Joe calls the rabbi his "faithful Indian companion," the incensed rabbi smacks the youth. His parents, insistent that they should be the ones to smack him, join the rabbi, and the three adults begin cuffing the boy about the head in a scene that rapidly leaves the realm of comedy. The rabbi is named Rabbi Baumel, the same name Allen gave to the rabbi contestant in the "What's My Perversion" sketch of *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex,* perhaps an autobiographical act of revenge on some childhood disciplinarian and the continuing denigration of Judaism.

The second, extended, sequence is set on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the holiest day in Judaism, when Jews fast for their sins. The family's neighbors blast their radio and clearly eat, even feast, in defiance of the day's solemnity. Ultimately, Uncle Abe goes next door to confront these communists. While he is gone, the mother, Tess (Julie Kavner), relates to Aunt Ceil (Renee Lippin) a story of the yenta, Mrs. Silverman, who spotted the neighbors' daughter kissing a black man, an act visualized through Tess's voice-over. Upon seeing the kiss, Mrs. Silverman suffered a stroke, her teacup frozen on the way to her mouth. At this point in Tess's story, Uncle Abe returns home, spouting the hoariest party-line clichés about the only sin being the exploitation of the workers. Religion is the opium of the masses, Abe proclaims, immediately substituting the religion of communism for the religion of Judaism. Not only does Abe eat, but he also has pork chops, thus breaking the holy fast of Yom Kippur and eating *treyfe* (nonkosher food) in the same sacrilegious moment.

Uncle Abe's quick conversion indicates that his commitment to communism is as superficial as his understanding of and commitment to Judaism. He and the rest of the family follow religion only because the neighbors do and have no understanding of why they

do so, nor any deeply felt emotional ties. When another neighbor does something else, they simply follow suit. Allen the filmmaker remains ambivalent about Yom Kippur, unsure of its significance and, for that matter, about God's role in modern Jewish life. When Aunt Ceil tells Abe that God will punish him, Abe's initial skepticism dwindles as he develops a severe case of heartburn. Thus, Allen clearly pokes fun at the superficial remnants of religious ritual, yet never brings himself to declare, with certainty, the death of God.

If God—or communism, for that matter—holds few answers, one sequence in the film offers a look at what does: the power of imagination and art to redeem ordinary lives and how the family can commune to make such a moment magical. Allen's voice-over relates which radio shows appeal to each family member. For Cousin Ruthie (Joy Newman), a little overweight and obviously Jewish like her equally overweight and Jewish parents, radio provides music, which provides an opportunity to escape her everyday life for a moment. The camera comes upon her as she lip-synchs and dances in turban and flowing skirt in front of a mirror to Carmen Miranda's "Down South American Way." Shortly thereafter her father and uncle see her and, instead of making fun of her or deriding her play, they join in the performance, becoming her backup group. This moment of quiet transcendence speaks of the liberatory possibilities of art and entertainment without the ponderousness of Allen's closing monologue in *Manhattan,* the sentimentality of the ending of *The Purple Rose of Cairo,* or the need for explanation, as in *Hannah and Her Sisters.* Although later in the film another radio program—a news report about a young child who is trapped in a well and then dies—provides another moment of warmth and peace for the family, the earlier moment provides visual insight into the transcendent moments that individuals and families occasionally achieve.

Allen next participated in an interesting, if not especially successful, experiment with an omnibus film, *New York Stories* (1989). Although intermittently attempted in Europe (Fellini was involved in three such films, Truffaut and Godard in another), such anthologies rarely appear in America. For *New York Stories,* three well-known directors, all intimately involved with New York City, each made a short film about some aspect of the city's life. Allen's contribution, "Oedipus Wrecks," with its classical and psychoanalytic implications, sounds like a hilarious glimpse into family dynamics.

Along with *Radio Days,* "Oedipus Wrecks" is Allen's most sustained look at parent-child relationships. The brilliant and funny conceit behind the film extends ideas first used in both "The Kugelmass Episode" and *The Purple Rose of Cairo.* A middle-aged son, Sheldon (Allen), plagued by the worst case of Jewish Mother in the annals of psychiatry, one day sees her disappear accidentally, courtesy of a magician's trick. He feels curiously liberated, now able to enjoy life with his shiksa girlfriend (Mia Farrow). One day, however, his mother manifests herself as a huge, cloudlike apparition in the skies above Manhattan, commenting for all to hear about her son's life. This drives Sheldon crazy. Talk about a super-ego! Talk about projection! Talk about guilt!

In desperation, he turns to a psychic, a cheap, pseudo-gypsy mystic (Julie Kavner) who, of course, is Jewish. The most interesting thing about the film, after the hallucinogenic apparition that is Mother, is that Sheldon abandons Mia Farrow's character and marries Julie Kavner's. This accommodation to his mother, marrying a Jewish girl although she has abandoned Judaism and substituted something else in its place, also represents Allen's accommodation to the Jewish community. Rather than give up the Jewish woman for the shiksa, he abandons the shiksa in favor of the Jew. This was not the pattern in the much earlier and more important *Annie Hall.*

Early in *Annie Hall* (1977), Allen delivers a long-take, static camera sequence that focuses upon a lengthy conversation between Alvy Singer (Allen) and his best friend Rob (Tony Roberts). The sequence begins in long-shot as Alvy and Rob converse on a Manhattan street, walking toward the camera. Primarily, the conversation revolves around Alvy's insistence that he is surrounded by anti-Semites. He claims that a television producer invited him to lunch by asking "Jew eat? Not, *did you* eat, but Jew eat?" Rob dismisses this perception as paranoiac raving. But Alvy has another example, that of a record clerk who insisted that the store was having a sale on "Wagner, Max, Wagner. Get it?" Rob responds by decrying the state of life in New York City and extolling the virtues of Los Angeles. Alvy sneeringly dismisses that idea with one of the two jokes in the film at Los Angeles's expense ("I won't move some place where the only cultural advantage is that you can make a right turn on a red light"; "L. A. is so clean because they take all their garbage and make it into television shows"). But the perception, real or imagined, of anti-Semitism and a love for New York City turn out to be two of the poles around which Allen structures this Oscar-winning film.

Annie Hall is a compendium of American-Jewish issues. Allen's

autobiographical Alvy Singer and his relationship to the midwestern Annie Hall reproduce a central motif of American-Jewish literature and cinema: the Jewish male and the shiksa. Interactions between Alvy and Annie's family point out the ambivalent attitude toward WASP society and the phenomenon of Jewish self-hatred. Through a complex narrative structure, Allen cuts a swath through American-Jewish culture and history, pointing to Jewish involvement in political causes, show business, and the Jewish educational achievement in America. Alvy Singer, unable to feel happy about his life and searching for an ultimate meaning, evolves into a compelling Jewish archetype.

Of course, his archetypal status springs from the complex of problems he manifests as the urban, Jewish neurotic. His anhedonia (the inability to feel happiness, and the original title of the film) may be humorous, but it stems from a series of issues intimately associated with being Jewish. For example, his obsession with death manifests itself in everything from a concern with the dissolution of the universe (he stops doing his homework when, as a youth, he is confronted by this reality) to a constant replaying of the Holocaust in the form of re-viewings of the monumental French documentary *The Sorrow and the Pity*.[14] Alvy's inability to sustain a relationship (two former wives and the breakup of his current relationship demonstrate this) are also outgrowths of his anhedonia, itself a function of paranoia and self-hatred. He feels simultaneously inferior and superior. At the start of the film, Alvy quotes Groucho Marx's joke about not wanting to belong to a club that would have someone like him as a member. His two divorces from Jewish women apparently spring from this attitude of inferiority, self-hatred, and Jewish anti-Semitism. At the same time, upon establishing a relationship with Annie Hall, a WASP, he begins to remake her, forcing his obsession with death upon her and demanding that she obsessively view *The Sorrow and the Pity* and Ingmar Bergman films. He pays for her psychoanalysis and for her tuition for evening classes at college. Alvy's inferiority-superiority conflict eventually manifests itself in one of the film's most famous scenes: the split-screen dinner that compares the Halls and the Singers.

Announcing its own departure from normative filmmaking is only one of the ways *Annie Hall* contains its own excesses. It is the clearest autobiographical expression yet in Allen's cinema. The film even begins with Allen directly addressing the camera in the first person. The character, not announced as Alvy Singer, is therefore presented as Woody Allen, already familiar on the basis of his appearance in ten previous films and a handful of television programs. Even after being marked as Alvy Singer not Woody Allen, the autobiographical references predominate. Alvy Singer is a comedian who lives in New York and dates a woman named Annie Hall, just as Woody Allen is a comedian who lives in New York and dates Diane Keaton, the actress who plays Annie Hall. The film also repeats numerous gags from earlier Allen efforts. Thus, it appears to be a personal project of both Alvy Singer's (whose own memories, fantasies, and desires structure it) and of Woody Allen's (who, as the author of the text, may be permitted any excesses he desires).

The major narrative strategy of the film is the flashback. The film progresses something like the monological reminiscences of Alvy, whose direct address opens it. The film closes with Alvy again speaking via voice-over in the same wistful tone with which he opened his talk to the audience. However, in discussing his breakup with Annie Hall, he moves from an attitude of uncertainty and self-doubt to a more positive, accepting stance. From the self-deprecation of the start, he concludes that he has made a difference in Annie's life (he takes it as a major coup that Annie takes her new boyfriend to see *The Sorrow and the Pity*), and he concludes, more importantly, that relationships are the fundamental aspect of life. The film that opens with a classic joke closes with another, the one about a man who complains to a psychiatrist that his brother-in-law thinks he's a chicken. When the doctor suggests putting him in an institution, the man claims that they would like to, "but we need the eggs."[15] Relationships, too often temporary, still give meaning to life, itself short, horrible, and filled with doubt and death, but we need the eggs. What brings Allen to this conclusion, to this new maturity, is precisely the bulk of the film, the scenes that Alvy recalls for the audience.

While Alvy sketches in his relationship with Annie Hall—their initial meeting, growing relationship, and slow breakup—he also provides glimpses of his early life, as if in recognition that where he comes from has made him what he is. Scenes with no direct narrative causality with Alvy's relationship to Annie Hall reveal his inner life. Although Allen calls the film *Annie Hall,* he focuses upon Alvy's thoughts, feelings, and background, not Annie's. Annie tells Alvy something of her life in Chippewa Falls, and we eventually see her parents, grandmother (the completely anti-Semitic Grammy Hall), and suicidal brother Duane. But they are seen through

Alvy's eyes. Similarly, although we see some of Alvy's past, it, too, is mediated through his eyes in scenes not so much constructed as flashbacks but as comic exaggerations of memories.

The majority of these memories focus upon his family life and childhood, and he recalls living near the ocean at Coney Island. The ocean will recur in *Radio Days* and is derived as much, perhaps, from Bergman and Fellini as it is from Allen's real autobiography. He lived near the ocean in the Midwood neighborhood of Brooklyn, but not so near as these films indicate. He admits that he exaggerates when he recalls that his apartment house sat literally under the roller coaster at the once-famous amusement park. Similarly, we take as exaggeration the constant arguments between his parents (again, much like *Radio Days*). One argument in particular reveals something of relations between Jews and blacks. A black cleaning woman apparently steals from the Singers. The father wants to forgive her because she is poor and clearly needs the money; the mother, less forgiving, recognizes that they themselves are hardly rich. In the ethnic enclaves of Brooklyn, relations between Jews and blacks always were much closer than between blacks and other white ethnics. This would, eventually, lead to much disharmony because the kinship and responsibility that Jews, an early ethnic success in America, felt toward blacks eventually led blacks to resent Jews.[16] A ridiculous argument cannot entirely displace Allen's serious invocation of Jewish–black relations.

Considering that the stereotype of the Jewish mother who smothers her son with guilt-inducing love is a constant in Jewish humor, its absence stands out in Allen's cinema. Annoyance and dismay seem more characteristic of Alvy's mother, as well as the few other mothers in Allen's work. In *Radio Days,* the most sustained image of the Jewish family in Allen's canon, the mother is less a harpy than usual and yet not particularly supportive. Alvy's mother certainly does not smother her son. For example, she reaches her wit's end when seven-year-old Alvy, realizing that the universe is expanding and will eventually break apart, stops doing his homework.

The horrors of family also appear in a part-memory, part-fantasy scene. The adult Alvy, with Rob and Annie, visits the old neighborhood, where they attend a party at the Singer household of the past, a party also attended by young Alvy. Young Alvy is dismayed by a family friend who, in an obnoxious effort to amuse, constantly harps upon his name, Joey Nichols (Nickles): "Remember my name: Joey Five Cents!" This is perhaps a universal component of adult life as seen through a child's eyes. More problematic is Rob's attitude toward another party guest. He interviews an aunt, an aging, overweight woman with a Yiddish accent, who claims that she "was considered the beauty of the family," a sentiment Rob and the audience take humorously. Too much self-hatred is evident here, as it is when Allen repeats the gag later in *Radio Days*. When the line is spoken by Aunt Bea to the father, he remarks, "Some competition!"

The image of Alvy's family finally comes to the fore in the split-screen sequence. Alvy, both dismayed and impressed by Annie's family during an Easter dinner, tells the audience that her family looks healthy and American, "not like my family." Claiming that the family looks American is an interesting slip of the tongue, for Alvy's family is also American; the Singers were all born in the United States. Allen's reference is obviously to the image of an American as a stereotypically healthy midwesterner, strong and solid-looking if somewhat bland.

When the Singers and another couple (presumably an aunt and uncle) are seen at the dinner table—the mother standing and everyone talking at once—the behavioral differences between them and the sedate, polite Halls are obvious. While the Halls speak of swap-meets and boating, the Singers discuss failure and disease. The ordeal of civility indeed! Yet for all the Halls' politeness and apparent all-Americanness, beneath their smooth exterior lies repression and psychopathology. The grandmother is an anti-Semite, the father is alcoholic, and the brother is suicidal. Allen/Alvy cannot reconcile the competing image of the WASP family. Although he condemns his own, he never elevates the WASP family in their place as an ideal.

His memories and fantasies of his family betray a profound ambivalence. So, too, does Alvy's choice of career: show business. Although a successful comedian (we see two scenes of him performing in concert and one scene on a television talk show), self-hatred is also directed toward his chosen profession. The references to California, home to most of show business, reflect Allen's continued denigration of television. The ambivalence is made even clearer when the horrors of Borscht Belt-type comedy appear in one of Alvy's flashbacks. A comic asks Alvy to supply him with jokes while he gives Alvy some idea of his "style"—all too reminiscent of the schmaltz of mediocre nightclub entertainers, such as Danny Rose to come.

Alvy's greatest ambivalence, however, manifests itself in how he

deals with relationships. Because he is divorced from two wives, it seems fair to conclude that—because they were Jewish, where Annie Hall is not—he succumbed to self-hatred in rejecting them. The basis for this conclusion is supplied by Alvy/Allen himself in his quote from Groucho Marx. Yet not only does Alvy try to remake Annie in his own image, but his relationship with Annie also founders.

Allison Porchnik (Carol Kane), Alvy's first wife, meets him at a rally for Adlai Stevenson, who is running for president. Alvy, nervous before addressing the crowd, strikes up a conversation with Allison. When he learns that she is writing a thesis on "Political Commitment in Twentieth Century Literature," he stammers out a litany of descriptions that, she humorously remarks, reduces her to a "cultural stereotype." His catalog description echoes an early, humorous foray into reverse stereotype, "The Whore of Mensa," which originally appeared in the *New Yorker* and is reprinted in *Without Feathers*. In the story, the beautiful Sherry, "packed into her slacks like two big scoops of vanilla ice cream," works as a call girl for men who want not physical contact but intellectual discussions with sexy women. When arrested by the hero, Kaiser Lupowitz, she pleads to be let go, and her whole story comes out: "Central Park West upbringing, Socialist summer camps, Brandeis. She was every dame you saw waiting on line at the Elgin or the Thalia, or penciling the words, 'Yes, very true' into the margin of some book on Kant" (*WF* 39).

Compare the description of Sherry with Alvy's list of Allison's background: "New York Jewish, Left-wing, liberal, intellectual, Central Park West, Brandeis University, Socialist Summer camps, father with the Ben Shahn drawings, right . . . really strike-oriented, kind of red." Alvy invokes this cultural stereotype, a Jewish one, to pigeonhole Allison. The stereotype (which, like all stereotypes, has at least an element of truth) itself indicates the tensions and ambivalence that have accompanied American Jewry's success.

Alvy's second wife, Robin (Janet Margolin), is equally Jewish but intellectual rather than political. The humor in this case is also specifically Jewish. At a party in their apartment, he complains to Robin that he is tired of having intellectual discussions with people who write for *Dysentery*. When Robin corrects him by saying *Commentary*, he quickly tells her that he has heard that *Commentary* and *Dissent* have merged to form *Dysentery*. The gag is more than simply a pun, of course, for both journals are Jewish and intellectual, and the idea of their merger is funny because they are diametrically

opposite politically. Thus the audience appreciates the fact that these publications are real, as well as the fact that they have different stances. It is a throwaway line, funny, as Jonathan Rosenbaum notes, without being particularly meaningful (99). Yet the gag is within a Jewish realm and thus highlights Allen's continued ambivalence and, by invoking diametrically opposed Jewish journals, the contradictions and contrasts within the American-Jewish community.

Alvy's former wives also indicate his changes in status, his economic and professional success. He moves from a lower-middle-class apartment house underneath the roller coaster in Coney Island to a more bohemian life-style, probably in Greenwich Village, and then, finally, uptown. We see him with Allison in their semi-bohemian apartment, with books strewn about and a mattress on the floor. It is just after November 1963, and Alvy agonizes over the Warren Commission's findings in the John F. Kennedy assassination. For all of the overt importance of the scene (Alvy wonders if he is just using the Kennedy conspiracy theories as an excuse to stop sleeping with his wife), it also reveals Alvy at a time when he was not quite as well to do as he will later become in his apartment with Robin.

The change in physical geography is also reflected in the look and attitude of the two wives. The modest, politically committed Allison's long hair is worn free, and she uses a minimum of jewelry and makeup; the more confident, assertive, socially committed Robin wears a hairstyle, makeup, and jewelry that are in the latest fashion. The next step, of course, is to the non-Jew, the WASP, the shiksa.

Alvy's economic and professional success mirror that of American Jewry's. The apartment house of his youth in Brooklyn represents the New Old Country of memory in the period from 1910 through 1940; the first generation of Jews born in the United States typically moved away from the tenements of the Lower East Side to Brooklyn or Queens. The move away from Brooklyn after World War II, seen in Alvy's relationship with Allison in the 1950s and early 1960s, indicates the economic success of postwar Jewry as well as the intellectual sophistication of the second and third generation, which was aided by the public school system and the fine, free colleges of New York. Even Alvy's profession mirrors the explosion of Jewish nightclub comics and television writers in the 1950s. Finally, by the late 1960s, Jews had it made in America for all to see; economic, political, and social success was manifested by an in-

creased visibility in entertainment, law, medicine, publishing, and politics.

Alvy's economic and professional success also translates into his success with women. *Annie Hall* essentially eliminates the schlemiel persona from Allen's repertoire, or at least the schlemiel who must pay to work behind the scenes in the burlesque house, as Victor Shakapopolis does in *What's New, Pussycat?* Just as Alvy's life-style in *Annie Hall* marks a major economic leap from his characters in *Take the Money and Run, Bananas,* and *Sleeper* (in which he was the proprietor of a health-food store before his untimely loss of time), so, too, his former alter egos would envy his success with women. Alvy married two beautiful women, has a current girlfriend of note, and even dates a number of attractive women following his breakup with Annie Hall.

Clearly, Alvy's/Allen's success with women is partly a function of his economic and professional success. But his confidence as a man stems in equal part from his greater sense of self-worth as a Jew. The image of Jews as weaklings, as nervous, neurotic urbanites, physically slight and athletically nil, was always belied after the war. For example, Jews were a major presence in boxing and basketball. Revelations of the Holocaust certainly contributed to an image of Jews as victims and aided the stereotype of the weakling. To be sure, Woody Allen's own persona enhanced this image in the early part of his career. But the image of Jews after the capture and trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961 and the victory in the Six Day War of 1967 (and changed by such films as *Exodus* [1960] and *Cast a Giant Shadow* [1966]) applies equally to Allen, especially once he had established himself as a significant filmmaker. Of course, two attractive Jewish former wives and an attractive current, shiksa girlfriend represented Allen's reality in 1977.

The professional and sexual success manifested by Alvy Singer are traits that Allen continued in later films. He also continued the basic dissatisfaction, the pervasive sense of unease, that characterize Alvy Singer and are manifested in his anhedonia. This sense of unease often stems from anti-Semitism, real or perceived. We have already noted the "Jew eat" conversation, and Annie Hall's description of Grammy Hall as anti-Semitic (which Alvy will solidify when he calls the old woman a "classic Jew hater" in the Easter-dinner scene) should also be emphasized. Yet how much of Grammy's overt anti-Semitism results from Alvy's paranoia (as Rob claims in the "Jew eat" sequence)? When Alvy is seen in the beard and garb of the Hasidic Jew, it comes not from Grammy's point of view, as

Brode claims (178), but rather from Alvy's imagining of Grammy's point of view.

The sense of unease also stems from the recognition of death, whether in the form of the universe that is constantly expanding until it will break apart or in the form of the Holocaust. Although the recognition of death may, therefore, spring in part from the historical memory of anti-Semitism and possibly its continuing remnants, it also comes from the recognition of the absence of God. Despite all the talk of death in *Annie Hall,* it remains one of the least overtly philosophical of Allen's films. The major manifestations of ontological concerns are a joke about cheating on his metaphysics final ("I looked within the soul of the boy sitting next to me"); a rejection of Duane's suicidal vision ("I'm due back on planet Earth now" is his response to Duane's poetically chilling death wish); and a quick joke at the expense of Judaism (in the split-screen dinner scene the Singers have no idea why they fast on Yom Kippur). A joke also occurs at the expense of popular religion. On his disastrous date with Pam (Shelley Duvall), the *Rolling Stone* reporter, she claims that a youthful maharishi is god. Alvy replies, "I think I see god now, coming out of the men's room." Again, Jewish humor (which Allen has made his own) typically thrusts downward from the sacred to the mundane. The joke, more at the expense of fads than of religion, finds its target in the gullible culture of youth. In addition to the maharishi, Pam makes claims for a handful of rock performers as gods.

Because its philosophical and metaphysical musings are minor, religion remains less important in *Annie Hall* than in other Allen films. The same holds true for esthetics. Although Alvy is a dedicated movie-goer, films provide an opportunity to discuss other issues. Films are serious, whereas television is not, but not in themselves capable of imparting meaning to life. Films hardly provide the glimpses into the transcendent that Allen would come to recognize in *Manhattan, Stardust Memories,* and *Hannah and Her Sisters,* for example. Similarly, the redemptive power of art to remake reality, although alluded to by the fact that Alvy writes a play based on his relationship with Annie but gives it an ending in which Annie returns to New York with him, provides little greater meaning to Alvy's efforts.

At the ending of the film, Alvy and Annie are apart. While the soundtrack returns the audience to Alvy via a voice-over, the image track directly derives from Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Eclisse.* The Italian film ends on a long-take of the cityscape where the protago-

nists were supposed to meet but do not. The space, empty of the main characters, becomes a final symbol of the emptiness of their lives. The cityscape, similarly significant in *Annie Hall,* is where Alvy and Annie were once at home together; it now stands sadly, metaphysically empty. Because Alvy's anhedonia is generalized—and Allen is not explicit about what bothers his protagonist—the audience is left simply with death. Nothing can be put in its place except relationships that inevitably fade.

That relationships do not simply fade but may also lead to death seems the unhappy conclusion of *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989). In earlier Allen films, romance or marriage leads to something like death (as, for example, in *Annie Hall, Manhattan, A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy, The Purple Rose of Cairo,* and even *Hannah and Her Sisters* and *Radio Days*). But never before has Allen's vision of relationships been so grim. One relationship ends in murder; another deteriorates to the point of outright animosity between the couple; yet another promises love until one member opts out and chooses someone else. Although one-night stands have been unsuccessful in previous Allen films (as seen in the memorable sequence with Shelley Duvall as the *Rolling Stone* reporter in *Annie Hall*), the disastrous date alluded to but thankfully never shown in detail in *Crimes and Misdemeanors* casts an unpleasant pall over much of the film.

Crimes and Misdemeanors must be reckoned important for Allen because it recasts and reworks crucial dichotomies that structure his previous films; more importantly, one dichotomy is almost completely eliminated. Allen again uses a comparative structure built around two sets of characters, as implicated by the title *Crimes and Misdemeanors.* The crimes and misdemeanors correspond to the opposition of drama to comedy (even tragedy to comedy in the classical sense), while Allen, as in *Hannah and Her Sisters,* relegates his own role to comic misdemeanors. He has, however, eliminated the WASP versus Jew dichotomy, a central conflict in much of his earlier work. In a strange way, the central Jewish character acts much like Allen's gentile figures. Not only is he well-to-do and serious, well-behaved and thoughtful like the WASPs in *Interiors* and *Another Woman,* but he is also a criminal, like the mother in *September,* a murderer. Although the title *Crimes and Misdemeanors* recalls Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment,* the film lacks the comic tone of Allen's earlier, Russian-inspired *Love and Death,* which overtly mocks Tolstoy's *War and Peace.* More significantly, *Love and Death* draws much of its comic force from the inappropriate sight of the

little Jew on the vast epic canvas; *Crimes and Misdemeanors* provides a genuine Dostoyevskyan protagonist. Although a Jew, he is, like Dostoyevsky's heroes, obsessed by a powerful loss of faith, gripped by a compelling existential angst, and possessed by a profound sense of guilt. The fact that he neither seeks nor finds pseudo-Christian redemption but is "saved" in a far different manner than Dostoyevsky's hero marks a difference in Allen's worldview, but not a comic difference. That the protagonist, the criminal, lives happily ever after is central to Allen's vision of the silence of God, the question of faith, and the significance of art in a meaningless world.

To begin to explore this film, and its significance for Allen's developing vision, it is necessary to first focus upon the comic character played by Allen himself in a role that represents a partial return to the schlemiel persona. The lovable loser so prominent in Allen's previous work also characterizes Cliff, a documentary filmmaker of rather modest means and minor reputation. Trapped in a loveless, sexless, marriage—Cliff rather crudely claims that "the last time I was inside a woman was when I visited the Statue of Liberty last year"—his one genuine pleasure comes from periodically taking his niece to the movies. However, he soon meets a very pretty and intelligent television producer, Hallie (Mia Farrow), while working on a project he abhors. Not only does he develop a romantic interest in Hallie, but the couple also share other joys in life: moviegoing and Cliff's work, especially an in-progress film on Louis Levy, a Holocaust survivor turned philosophy professor. That Levy echoes sentiments apparent throughout much of Allen's previous work is clear from the many inserts in which he appears. In fact, the first film-within-the-film sequence finds the professor discussing the biblical tale of Abraham sacrificing Isaac, recalling the other occasions upon which Allen has invoked this tale and raising implications for the ontological questions the film poses. Profound questions of faith and of justice, both implicated by this biblical story, resonate throughout *Crimes and Misdemeanors.*

Significantly Cliff, the schlemiel, does not win in this film. It was said of silent clown Harry Langdon that he embodied the little man watched over by God. The same could be said of other great silent clowns, like Chaplin and Keaton, who had profound impact upon Allen's work. Although it is more problematic and ambiguous, the same might be said of the schlemiels of Yiddish literature who have similarly influenced Allen. In *Crimes and Misdemeanors,* Allen demonstrates that the schlemiel exists forever at the mercy of a hostile universe; the loser, no matter how lovable, cannot and will not win.

Cliff's marriage continues to deteriorate, his hoped-for relationship with Hallie dies, and in perhaps the cruelest cut of all, Louis Levy commits suicide, thereby ruining Cliff's film and blighting the optimistic message he hoped to convey. The little man watched over by God becomes a cosmic joke because God does not exist, or if He does, He is blind to the plight of those who most need Him. Allen's God is no longer merely an underachiever; He is vast, indifferent, and sightless.

The blindness of God may be a Jewish-American variation on Bergman's *The Silence of God,* but Allen develops it through a conscious, recurring motif of eyes and vision. He confines the motif of blindness to the serious side of the film—the crimes—as if to explain the other, less serious side. The film's serious hero, Judah Rosenthal (Martin Landau), is an eminent ophthalmologist. One of his patients, a rabbi, is going blind. Late in the film, Judah recollects a conversation with his lover Dolores (Anjelica Huston) in which she recalls her mother telling her that the eyes are the windows of the soul. After Dolores is dead, Judah looks into her eyes and then tells his brother that nothing is behind her eyes any longer. Finally, and most significantly, Judah tells a crowd gathered to pay tribute to him that his father repeatedly told him that "the eyes of God are on us always." Perhaps, he only half-jokes, this is why he became an eye doctor. This belief that God sees everything first paralyzes him from contemplating Dolores's murder seriously and then plagues him after the deed is done.[17]

Another sort of blindness also extends to Cliff and to the misdemeanors side of the film. Cliff literally does not see what Hallie values in Lester (Alan Alda), for instance. To him, his brother-in-law is a pompous windbag and the worst kind of show business Jew: a Sammy Glick with intellectual pretensions. Indeed, it is hard not to agree with Cliff. So why does Hallie ultimately agree to marry Lester and willingly leave Cliff to go to London, as Tracy did to Allen's alter ego in *Manhattan*? Although we romantically, perhaps naively, assume that Tracy might eventually return to Ike, Hallie returns married to Lester, much to Cliff's dismay. She merely claims that Cliff does not know the real Lester. Another bad judge of a would-be romantic partner is Cliff's sister, a single mother who tells Cliff of her disastrous encounter with a man she met through the personal advertisements. Instead of making love to her while she was tied to the bed, he defecated on her. As Cliff relates the incident to his own wife (who receives the tale rather coolly), he only expresses bemusement at human sexuality.

But something more than bemusement clings to the images of relationships in this film, and something much more lethal than blindness. In both the crimes and the misdemeanors of the account, things go seriously wrong with romance. Cliff, who lives in a hopelessly unhappy marriage, remains unable to establish a solid relationship with Hallie. Judah Rosenthal, seemingly happily married, engages in an affair for more than two years. Because his mistress proves unwilling to break off the liaison when he has had enough, Judah instigates her death. Although we might interpret the failure of Cliff's relationship to Hallie and Judah's to Dolores as a rejection of the Jewish man–shiksa pairing, often a failure in Allen's earlier films, it has never ended in murder as it does in *Crimes and Misdemeanors.*

In fact, for all the separation between crimes and misdemeanors, two murders of a sort really occur in the failed Jew–shiksa relationships. In one, the Jewish man has the shiksa killed; in the other, the shiksa kills the Jewish man's beliefs. Obviously, Allen wants his audience to pay primary attention to the relationship between Judah and Dolores, just as Judah's own doubts and crises receive primary attention at the expense of Cliff's. But it is also necessary to pay attention to how Allen compares the differing Jew–shiksa relationships. On the one hand, for example, in each instance the relationship is broken off by a long-take scene. In the major relationship, Judah breaks off with Dolores in her apartment. Here Allen shoots a lengthy long-take sequence of almost four minutes' duration, deceptive because it involves seven major reframings of the conversation. On the other hand, Hallie is in the park when she breaks off with Cliff, and the long-take is slightly less than two minutes in duration and consists primarily of a tracking shot that becomes a static two-shot. It is clear that Judah wishes to end the relationship with Dolores and will, in essence, murder her; yet Hallie ends the relationship with Cliff and essentially "murders" his idealism.

The fact that Hallie kills something vital in Cliff becomes apparent in his rather strange response to her announcement of her marriage to Lester and her statement that she truly loves him. "This is my worst fear realized," he says. What precisely does Cliff-Allen mean? It is not the fear of anti-Semitism (à la Alvy Singer) because Hallie marries another Jewish man or the fear of peer ridicule that distresses Isaac Davis. Allen specifically tells us what this fear means a short while later, when Cliff offers almost the same exact response to Judah's pseudo-fictional account of murdering Dolores. Thus, the only way to appreciate what Hallie has

Hallie (Mia Farrow) breaks up with Cliff (Woody Allen)—another of the crimes and misdemeanors in the film of the same name.

murdered in Cliff is to understand the significance that murdering Dolores has for Judah.

In Judah Rosenthal, Allen creates the modern Jewish man as confident adult, possessing a loving family, status in his field, and recognition in his community. Judah is certainly no schlemiel, no erstwhile Isaac sacrificed to some arbitrary God. Instead, he is a patriarch, a father and father figure, a scientist, and a devout rationalist, a skeptic with doubts about God but with, significantly, a solid Jewish education and philosophical basis from which to question his own beliefs. Although Allen does not present Judaism in completely positive terms, he includes none of the negatives of earlier pictures: no arbitrary insertions of comic Hasids or satire on religious beliefs. Judah, at the start of the film, thinks of himself as a modern Job who wonders why God punishes him with Dolores, who threatens to expose him to his wife as an adulterer and, later, to the community as an embezzler—a Bathsheba to his David.

Thinking back to his childhood education in the synagogue and his own father's faith and belief, Judah's unpunished murder strengthens his doubts about the existence of God. At his lowest point he returns to the New Old Country of neighborhood Queens and remembers a typical seder, with his father, Sol, quietly proclaiming his religious faith. Judah also recalls the alternative voice, that of cynical reason, symbolized by his Aunt May, who invokes the powerful facts of the Holocaust as proof of God's absence. To Aunt May's question about God punishing him, Sol answers: "He won't punish me, May, he punishes the wicked." May's incredulous answer can only be: "Oh, who, like Hitler? Six million Jews burned to death and he got away with it!"

Sol will not hear of doubts. And Judah remains, until the end, torn about his own beliefs. For him, the murder of Dolores, the most heinous crime he can commit, must ultimately be taken as a test of God's presence, just as on a much larger scale the Holocaust created a monumental rift in Judaic theology. That Judah is a murderer, whereas the Holocaust Jews were murdered, is perhaps Allen's disguised response to the deterioration of Jewish ethical standards (as indicated earlier in his response to Israeli handling of the *intifada*). When he goes unpunished, Judah takes grim satisfaction in proving his father, as well as previous generations of Jewish thinkers, wrong.

Judah's stance, however, does not go entirely unchallenged. Juxtaposed to him is Ben (Sam Waterston), a modern rabbi. Ben is another father (his grown daughter's wedding party is the film's

final scene) and father figure in this surprisingly traditionally Jewish film in which religion, philosophy, and education are the provinces of men. Judah's mother is not identified in his flashback to the seder, and Judah's wife (Claire Bloom) is a minor character. Ben and Judah engage in philosophical, theological discussions—twice in Judah's office and once in Judah's imagination—in which Ben and his father are conflated as the voices of optimistic faith and believers in a just God and world; Abraham is willing to accept God's decrees.

On the one hand, Ben and Sol both maintain that "God sees." In the face of Judah's doubts, Ben has faith. In the face of Judah's belief in the harshness of life and the pitiless nature of the universe, Ben maintains a firm belief in a moral structure that has real meaning and the possibility of forgiveness underpinned by a higher power. Ben firmly believes, has faith, because if God does not see, if He does not exist, "it's all darkness." Not only does Ben echo Judah's father, but he also makes explicit the search for values and eternal verities for which Allen has searched during the course of his cinema. He ultimately allows Ben to be something of a final image in the film.

On the other hand, Judah's conviction that God does not exist is confirmed precisely by Judah's opposite, Cliff the schlemiel. Against Ben's optimism versus Judah's pessimism, Allen juxtaposes Louis Levy's optimism against Cliff's schlemiellike pessimism. Unfortunately, Professor Levy disappoints Cliff and thus supports Judah. Upon learning of Levy's suicide, Cliff, shocked, says: "He'd seen the worst side of life, always was affirmative. . . . Always said 'yes' to life, 'yes, yes.' Today he said 'no'!" Why he said no—why he "went out the window"—is seemingly left open. Levy is a Holocaust survivor yet contemporary life drives him to suicide (perhaps like another Levi, Primo Levi), another ironic reversal of the image of the Holocaust. The implications of Levy's action might be seen by juxtaposing him to Lester because Cliff makes a film about each man.

Levy leads what philosophers call the examined life and says things that are meaningful and challenging, whereas Lester, for all his pontifications, sounds like a typical Allen pseudo-intellectual, for example, the man at the movie theater in *Annie Hall* confronted by Marshall McLuhan. Yet the world basically ignores Levy while it rewards Lester, who brags that he never graduated from college and yet college professors teach courses devoted to his work. (The same is true, of course, of Woody Allen, who must wonder how much of Lester is in himself.) Similarly, Allen also compares Lester with Judah in one of the film's subtlest juxtapositions. As Judah remembers his father's certainty that "the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked will be punished for eternity," Allen cuts to Lester on a date with Hallie, whom Lester will later marry.

Because Cliff makes a television documentary about him, he is implicated in Lester's success. In a deontological rather than teleological argument, Allen wonders whether the good of making a film about Levy justifies the bad of glorifying a man like Lester. Thus Lester prospers while Levy dies just as the film about Lester will air on television; the one of Levy will never be completed. Because both Levy and Lester are Jewish and work in areas in which Jews excel (academia and show business), Levy's suicide can be viewed as an index of how contemporary Jewry, and the world at large, substitutes false values for worthwhile ideals in the pursuit of success. Levy's suicide, however, is merely a prelude to Cliff's greatest personal disappointment; Hallie leaves him for Lester. His worst fears are realized: God cannot orchestrate justice in the world because there is no God.

To substitute for God, especially for religion, we once again find movies. Movies function, initially, as counterpoint to the film's action, an implicit commentary upon the differences between real life and reel life, a motif prominently featured in *Play It Again, Sam.* Following a number of key dramatic scenes, the film cuts to movie scenes of a similar nature, except they function as comic irony. A discussion of marriage and divorce early in the film leads to a clip from Hitchcock's *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (1941), itself a comedy about marriage and divorce. When Judah first contemplates murder, Allen cuts to a sequence from *This Gun for Hire* (1942), in which Laird Cregar similarly asks another man to commit a murder for him. It is a rather humorous scene, especially taken out of context. Later, when Judah learns that a police detective wants to speak to him, Allen cuts to a clip of Betty Hutton singing "Murder He Says" from *Happy Go Lucky* (1943). These inserts from Hollywood movies are motivated within the world of the film by the fact that Cliff watches them. Movies directly relate to Cliff himself; after Hallie tells him she is going to London for four months, we see a montage sequence from *The Last Gangster* (1937) in which time passes slowly for the imprisoned Edward G. Robinson. It is obviously meant to express Cliff's feelings of entrapment and the slow parade of weeks

before Hallie's return. Allen intends, and his audience understands, that these sequences are symbolic commentaries upon the ways movies often treat serious themes.

Differences between Hollywood movies and real life come to the fore when Judah tells Cliff about his idea for a movie. He describes an act he did previously in this movie: commit a murder, feel some guilt about it, and overcome it with hardly a memory or guilt feeling left. "One morning," says Judah, "he awakens [and] the crisis has lifted." Cliff wonders if the man can ever really go back to the way things were.

Judah: With time it all fades.
Cliff: Yes, but then his worst beliefs are realized.
Judah: Well I said it was a chilling story, didn't I?

Judah goes on to claim that, in reality, we all rationalize and find ways to live with our sins, mistakes, and dreadful deeds. Cliff wants a different ending rather than Judah's happy one: "I would have him turn himself in. . . . Because in the absence of God . . . he is forced to assume that responsibility himself. Then you have tragedy." Judah replies, "But that's fiction. . . . If you want a happy ending you should go see a Hollywood movie."

Allen wants us to be certain, then, not to mistake this movie for a Hollywood movie; the happy ending that is Judah's (and Lester's) but not Cliff's represents the way things are in the world. Thus, he intersperses other Hollywood movies into the film and further dissociates himself from Hollywood movie-making by having Cliff's job be that of a documentary filmmaker. Of course, he assigns himself the role of the uncompromised, who will not bend to the will of the system, whether television or Hollywood. It is thus important for the audience to learn that Cliff was formerly an editor for newsreel footage. He quit, presumably, because he no longer wanted to be a party to the kinds of distortions that commercial news perpetrates upon the public. Cliff's earlier documentaries include a film on leukemia and one on acid rain. Allen does not make such films, although he is fond of injecting a fatal disease or two into his movies, for example, ALS in *Stardust Memories* or the dreaded brain tumor of *Hannah*.

Instead of interpreting Cliff's films as Allen's guilt feelings for not making movies of a more politically or socially engaged nature, however, we see them as symbolic of Allen's. They stand in for Allen's movies and for him not giving in to the system that demands upbeat or positive movies like a profile of the phony Lester.

Therefore, Cliff's latest film becomes a philosophical meditation from Louis Levy, just as *Crimes and Misdemeanors* is a philosophical meditation from Woody Allen: although not quite the tragedy that Cliff wants Judah's movie to be, it is not quite the comedy that Allen has made previously. If not a tragedy, the film is an anticomedy wherein the murderer goes unpunished and the little schlemiel remains a loser, wherein the righteous are not rewarded and the wicked prosper.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the film should end with a conflation of Cliff's and Allen's film, in which Allen allows voice-overs of Louis Levy to accompany images from earlier in the film itself. It is also no surprise that what Professor Levy has to say is suspiciously similar to what Allen has said for years: We are the sum total of our choices; only through the capacity to love do we give meaning to an indifferent universe and, despite our misery, find joy in simple things like family, work, and the hope that future generations might understand more than ours. But we must take our joy only in moments and believe in love despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. As proof of this, scenes from earlier in *Crimes and Misdemeanors* give way to images of Ben, sightless but enjoying the company of friends and relatives who have gathered together. For a filmmaker and a film viewer, going blind must be an event of monumental pathos, evidence of God's willingness to inflict suffering. Nevertheless, Allen feels that our faith in life must be blind, as is the rabbi who dances with his daughter at her wedding at the film's end.

Notes

1. See, for example, Dee Burton, *I Dream of Woody*, David Wild, *The Movies of Woody Allen: A Short, Neurotic Quiz Book*, and Graham Flashner, *Fun with Woody: The Complete Woody Allen Quiz Book*.

2. Along with Chekhov and Bergman, Ibsen has also been a model for Woody Allen. In addition to the Ibsen-derived structure of *September*, in *Annie Hall*, Alvy's second wife, Robin, complains at one point that she has a headache, "like Osvald's in *Ghosts*." In *Hannah and Her Sisters*, Hannah starts the film fresh from a theatrical triumph in *A Doll's House*.

3. *Manhattan* is one of the few American films to be released to home video in the letter-boxed format, which, by blacking out portions of the top and bottom of the screen, preserves the aspect ratio of CinemaScope, a contractual demand on Allen's part.

4. The Holocaust also recurs more subtly in *Shadows and Fog* (1992), Allen's

film adaptation of his one-act play *Death* (*Without Feathers* 45–106) by way of Ingmar Bergman's *Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953). If the paranoia that pervades the entire film springs from a monstrously arbitrary murderer who stalks the vaguely middle-European village in which the film is set, one instance (not in the original play) clearly calls forth the scapegoating of European Jewry by the Nazis. Allen's little-man hero, Kleinman, comes upon a scene of black-clad police rounding up a Jewish family (indexed by their name). The police tell him that although he is "one of them," he is okay for now, but that he should mind his own business or he will be next.

5. A handful of academic film critics have applied the notion of "the dialogic," from the theoretical writings of Mikhail Bahktin, to the cinema of Woody Allen. In this view, one text "argues with [another], agrees with it (although with conditions), interrogates it, eavesdrops on it, but also ridicules it, parodically exaggerates it" (Pogel 8). Linked to the dialogic is " 'the carnivalesque,' the Rabelaisian, festive comedy that served as Mikhail Bahktin's model of subversion and revitalization in the dialogic imagination" (Pogel 190). The medieval carnival, "in which people took to the streets in costume, in which the vulgar parodied the polite and sacred to symbolically destroy all convention and restriction" (Pogel 222–23) found its greatest exemplar, according to Bahktin, in the works of Rabelais. Such critics as Pogel and Robert Stam see Allen, especially *Zelig*, as continuing this tradition. Of course, none claims that Allen was influenced by Bahktin, rather, that Bahktinian "dialogism" can be used to shed light upon Allen's cinema and its significance. We feel that Allen's dialogic and parodic penchants owe much to Yiddish theater as a direct influence, itself symptomatic of modern Jewish mediations with the dominant culture; Jewishness, as expressed in the Yiddish theater and the work of Woody Allen and Mel Brooks, for instance, is itself dialogic. As Stam notes, in Bahktinian terminology, "the theatre that 'fathered' Zelig was a theatre full of transformations and boisterous polyglossia" (210).

6. The scenes of Leonard at the sideshow recall a film released shortly before *Zelig*, *The Elephant Man* (1980). Is it too much of a coincidence that *The Elephant Man*, the story of someone whose difference made him a horrifying celebrity, was brought to the screen as the first project of Mel Brooks's newly formed Brooksfilms? Allen, in these scenes at the sideshow and in Zelig's transformations, and Brooks by producing *The Elephant Man* and his own films, continue to identify with outsiders and "monsters."

7. Links between Irish and Jew are a dominant feature in silent and early sound cinema in the United States, exemplified by *Abie's Irish Rose*. (See Lester Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew*, chapters 1 and 2; and David Desser in *Unspeakable Images*.) John Murray Cuddihy (himself of Irish extraction writing sympathetically of the Jewish experience) attempts to draw links between the two groups based on structural similarities between Irish persecution at the hands of the English and Jewish persecution at the hands of the Russians. Cuddihy maintains that both groups were "latecomers to modernity." (See also Stam, *Subversive* 214–15.)

8. We earlier noted that one of the traditions Allen uses is silent comedy, drawing on the work of Buster Keaton, among others. The tone of the ending of *Zelig* is reminiscent of Keaton's quite outrageous ending to his classic comedy, *College*. Keaton has pitifully pursued the heroine throughout the film until he finally wins her via his athletic skills. A coda following their happy union reveals them in a series of still images that quickly take them from marriage to family to old age, with the film closing on a shot of their tombstones side by side.

9. If *Broadway Danny Rose* is marginally autobiographical in terms of Allen's life, it also derives some of its parameters from the biography of co-star Mia Farrow, who was once married to Frank Sinatra. Nancy Pogel notes the resemblances of Allen's film to a minor Sinatra vehicle called *Meet Danny Wilson* (193). She also makes some labored comparisons between *Broadway Danny Rose* and *The Godfather*, without, however, recalling the fact that the character of Johnny Fontaine in Coppola's film (the character whose desire for a part in a movie leads to the infamous horse's-head-in-the-bed scene) is allegedly based on Frank Sinatra. More to the point, however, is a wicked in-joke that Allen delivers. Tina (Mia Farrow), in Danny's apartment, sees a picture on his wall. "Who's this?" she asks. Danny responds incredulously, "Who's this? That's Frank!"

10. One hopes that Aunt Rose was on his mother's side of the family, lest there was a time when her name was Rose Rose! It is more than likely, however, that Danny Rose is a stage name. Having probably changed his name from a more obviously Jewish one, for example, Rosen or Rosenberg, gives Danny one more thing to feel guilty about. The paradox of Jewish entertainers changing their name only to become intimately associated with Jewishness can be found all the way back to Asa Yoelson, who became Al Jolson, and forward through Allen Stewart Konigsberg, who became Woody Allen.

11. Nancy Pogel, otherwise an astute observer of Allen's films, has transposed Irving Sachs (Sax) and R. H. Levine to "R. J. (*sic*) Sax and Irving Levine" (205).

12. Although we speak of the "Jewishness" of Allen's religious implications, Pogel notes that purple roses are associated in Christian mythology (her term) with crucifixion and rebirth. "Roses are associated with the mother of Christ and with Cecilia, one of the most innocent martyred saints in Christian literature" (190).

13. Can Allen be referencing a scene in Akira Kurosawa's *Dodeskaden* (1970), another portrait of a poor neighborhood and the specific types who inhabit it, in which a man runs amok, brandishing a samurai sword? Allen is familiar with the Japanese cinema. In one scene in *Annie Hall*, Alvy and Annie stand in front of a movie marquee that prominently features *Chushingura*, a classic Japanese tale. Similarly, in the later *Husbands and Wives* (1992), at one point we see Jack (Sydney Pollack) and Sally (Judy Davis) standing outside a theater whose marquee displays *Ran*, a film Kurosawa directed in 1985.

14. *The Sorrow and the Pity* is not primarily "about" the Holocaust, although it is hard not to reference the Holocaust in any story of the Nazis and their collaborators. In fact, within the film, Alvy and Annie discuss the movie in

American-Jewish Filmmakers

Traditions and Trends

David Desser and
Lester D. Friedman

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