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**THREE WOODY ALLEN FILMS:  
THE MATURING OF A  
FILMMAKER**

**THESIS**

**Presented to the Graduate Council of the  
University of North Texas in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements**

**For the Degree of**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**By**

**Russell D. Jeter, B.M.**

**Denton, Texas**

**August, 1992**

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The thesis examines Allen's development using ANNIE HALL (1977), MANHATTAN (1979), and HANNAH AND HER SISTERS (1986) as landmarks. Three criteria (chapters) structure the analysis: comedy, narrative, and romance.

After the comedic crystallization of ANNIE HALL, Allen displayed subtler humor in MANHATTAN. HANNAH AND HER SISTERS fused the comical "little man" with sophisticated drama. ANNIE HALL incorporated a modernist narrative into a traditional three-act structure. MANHATTAN's less rambunctious, linear narrative let the characters and relationships breathe more. The ambitious HANNAH AND HER SISTERS involved a larger cast and multiple, interweaving plot lines. ANNIE HALL developed, MANHATTAN explored, and HANNAH AND HER SISTERS broadened the scope of the trademark Woody Allen romantic relationship.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In the 1991 biography Woody Allen, Eric Lax wrote,

Consider the singular deal he has had from the financiers and distributors of all his films: Providing he stays within a certain budget, he has total artistic freedom. Period. The script, the choice of actors, the direction, the editing, the music, *everything* is subject to his approval alone. It is a license no one else has and he does not take it lightly.

Executives at whatever company backs him...at first seldom saw and now never see any version of his scripts, and in fact know little about his current movie until he shows it to them when it is ready for release.<sup>1</sup>

Such control welcomes auteurist criticism. Seeming the product of a one-man show, a Woody Allen film can be casually construed as a singular vision. The following study, a discussion of a filmmaker's maturation, is basically auteurist in approach, but it does not dismiss the collaborative effort integral to filmmaking--collaboration which includes, but transcends numbers of bodies on location or pre- through post production meetings.

No act of creativity exists in a vacuum. However unique or original the expression, the undeniable presence and power of influence has laid some form of groundwork. Though Woody Allen has become established

in his craft, his most recent film *SHADOWS AND FOG* (1992) owes much to the sway of Fritz Lang, Franz Kafka, and Ingmar Bergman, for example, just as Allen's trademark screen character in the film evidences references to Charlie Chaplin, Groucho Marx, and Bob Hope.

That influence shapes creativity explains the multi-faceted mold of Woody Allen. Before carving his name into the ranks of great American filmmakers, he began his career as a comedy writer turned stand-up comedian turned personality whose many adolescent afternoons in Brooklyn movie houses left in him an indelible fascination with film. Comedy impressed Allen as a child the most, but it was a Swedish film that broadened a young Allen's sensibilities. "Seeing Bergman the first time was pleasure, just pleasure," he remembers. "Sure we (he and his teen-age friends) were drawn to *SUMMER WITH MONIKA* because we heard there was nudity, but that stopped being the reason as soon as we saw the movie."<sup>2</sup> Never one to adjust to the regimen of school, Allen dropped out of college, but voraciously read great literary works. "I found I liked Faulkner and Hemingway," he recalls, "although not Fitzgerald so much."<sup>3</sup> The contrast in Allen's influences have shaped the perspective of a serious clown needing to expound intellectual and ontological angst with a razor-sharp wit.

Known primarily for his films, Allen has produced a remarkably varied *oeuvre* numbering twenty to date (as director) with another in progress. Though the film medium now dominates his career, Allen entered the show business industry as a writer. He has said of the filmmaking process,

I enjoy the writing the most. (The film) always seems great in the writing. You're at home alone in your apartment and, you know, it's just great. Gradually the compromises come in. And those lines are not so funny that you thought were so great back in your apartment...I would like to conceive of the film and then press a button and have the film master.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the fact that writing lies at the base of Allen's talent explains why, in tracing Allen's filmmaking maturation, the writing element keeps slipping into the foreground. The following study, while analyzing film, largely discusses thematic continuities, character development, shifts in narrative style, and treatment of subject matter. Visual style and other relatively important aspects of filmmaking are necessarily included, but a consideration of Allen's writing dominates the study.

Three films lend themselves, as much for their similarities as for their differences, to a pattern of maturation: ANNIE HALL (1977), MANHATTAN (1979), and HANNAH AND HER SISTERS (1986)--all contemporary romantic comedies set in New York. The three films explore similar themes with different approaches. The relatively short two-year period between ANNIE HALL and MANHATTAN reflects rapid growth and an ambitious flexing of successful directorial muscles. HANNAH AND HER SISTERS, six years and five films later, provides an extension of the first two films bringing Allen back to his celebrated element with fresh wisdom.

Woody Allen the character, the whiney little neurotic with whom so many identify, is too easily mistaken for Woody Allen the man. "One

confronts events with bravado", writes Eric Lax, "but is generally undone; the other serenely reigns over circumstance."<sup>5</sup> This paper often relates Allen the screen character to Allen the filmmaker, but only as a personified vehicle of expression. Neither Alvy Singer nor Isaac Davis nor Mickey Sachs *is* Woody Allen.

The first chapter, "Comedy", briefly traces Allen's roots in comedy, then examines the development of comedic devices through the three films. Chapter Two, "Narrative", investigates Allen's use of the medium to tell a story. Chapter Three, "Romance", follows the progression of the films' different characters' romantic relationships, a motif common to all of Allen's films, and central to ANNIE HALL, MANHATTAN, and HANNAH AND HER SISTERS.



## CHAPTER II

### COMEDY

When critics knock at the door of mystery with the knuckles of cognition it is quite right that the door should open, and some mysterious power should squirt them in the eye.

-Saul Bellow<sup>6</sup>

Such a power is what Woody Allen calls comedy.

-Graham McCann<sup>7</sup>

Walter Blair has theorized a two-fold history of American humor. The first type, a product of the nineteenth-century frontier experience and national confidence, revolves around "horse sense" or "common sense". The humor is boisterous and racy. One sees his surrounding environment as controllable, predictable, and stable. The coming of the twentieth-century, however, produced the second part of Blair's theory: the "dementia praecox" variety, or humor of "the little soul".<sup>8</sup> The industrial revolution spawned big business replete with beleaguering, dehumanizing factories and machinery. The "controllable" environment became intimidating and frustrating. Soon, humorists were reflecting the predicament of a new era. Rene Clair's *A NOUS LA LIBERTE* (1931), for example, comically but acidly focused on the dehumanizing aspects of big business, paralleling life in a factory with prison. Charlie Chaplin's *MODERN TIMES* (1936) showed the

comedian wrestling with great gears and demonic assembly lines. The humor of the "little man" was evolving. As Nancy Pogel wrote, "The early little-man humorist stands at the intersection of contradictory options; he feels himself to be a stranger in his own culture; familiar settings come to seem dream-like, artificial, and unreal."<sup>9</sup>

Society continued to become more complex, and the "little man" found himself facing new kinds of adversaries: God, organized religion, medical science, feminism, the sexual revolution, ever-changing mores and ethics, and other sociological demons. As the enemy grew more complex and subjective, so did the solutions for winning the battle. Humor became more cerebral, more intellectual, more philosophical, and, ultimately, more self-absorbed. The "little man" was now intimidated by *inner* machinery. Sociological awareness fostered a new set of pressures which, in turn, fostered a new set of insecurities and doubts. Woody Allen told Robert Benayoun in a 1978 interview:

...since the great wave of slapstick comedians, since Keaton and Chaplin and Langdon, the playing area has moved out of the realm of the physical to that of the psychological...now everything has become electronic and Freudian and the interest has shifted. The conflict is no longer about: Can I find work? Can I cope with nuts and bolts in a factory? It is: Can I stand the stress and pressure of working in an affluent society? The conflict is more subtle.<sup>10</sup>

Allen's comic influences are many, but Charlie Chaplin, Groucho Marx, and Bob Hope pervade whenever the filmmaker discusses his idols: "As soon as Chaplin comes down the street I start to laugh -- his

really primitive unmotivated hostility."<sup>11</sup> Of Groucho, he has said, "Groucho was a master, a cynical irreverent institution..."<sup>12</sup> Allen's hostility and irreverence can easily be seen in his pokes at (and attacks on) organized religion, bureaucracy, and intellectuality. In his pre-ANNIE HALL films, the Groucho and Chaplin influences come through in the physicality of the comedy. He futilely wrestles with office machinery in a Chaplinesque manner in BANANAS, for example, and his wisecracks and strutting in SLEEPER strongly resemble the Groucho character.

Bob Hope's influence on Allen can best be seen in LOVE AND DEATH. There is plenty of Hope-ish quickfire patter, echoing the "screwball" comedies of the thirties, and Allen's character, Boris, exudes the comical cowardice and guy-next-door vulnerability so reminiscent of Hope's non-ethnic *schlemiel* character. Graham McCann observed that:

Allen may recall Groucho in his manipulation of language in order to mock the conventions of others, but he is nearer to Hope in his *vulnerability* (women answer back to Hope and Allen, and when they insult authority figures they may well end up behind bars).<sup>13</sup>

Allen would take the coward-in-us-all character farther than Hope, but the inspiration is undeniable. "You really believed in him," Allen said of the famous comedian, "...He was much more real than Groucho."<sup>14</sup>

The 1950s was a turning point for American comedy. In nightclubs all across the country, comedians like Elaine May, Mort Sahl, Mike Nichols, and Lenny Bruce (all Jewish, by the way) were challenging the

established comedic patter, set up by Hope and his contemporaries, with a more sophisticated type of humor aimed at young, college-educated, politically-aware audiences. The approach was more subversive--the minority versus the majority. Mort Sahl, a huge influence on Allen, would walk onstage, open a newspaper, and editorialize. Lenny Bruce's material became so politically oriented that his act eventually consisted less of comedy than commentary. But these comedians took shots at larger, oppressive targets like the government, bureaucracy, and racism. They were wise, angry, and afraid.

The late sixties and early seventies ushered in new concerns. The Vietnam war and the Civil and Womens movement produced unprecedented social unrest and authority was questioned to an even greater extent. Drugs became the great escape, the Sexual Revolution exploded, and beatniks with heavier existentialist attitudes evolved into hippies.

Ideological strides were made, but new problems developed. The new sexual permissiveness and the women's movement ripped up sex role borderlines. Self images and concepts became confused. The disappearance of traditional romantic ideologies left some couples wide-eyed. Women had to deal with new independence and men were feeling threatened and emasculated.

Woody Allen makes no bones about fearing sociological manifestations and complications that threaten romantic idealism. In *PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM* (1972), for instance, his character, Allan Felix, worships Humphrey Bogart in *CASABLANCA*. Felix is having problems attracting the opposite sex and the Bogart ideology ("Relationship?

Where'd you learn a word like that--from one of those Park Avenue headshrinkers?") brings fantastic relief from the reality of Felix's inability to develop, even initiate, a "relationship" in the more complex realm of romance. The escape is nostalgia--the simplicity of yesteryear.

Other demons also necessitate comedic escape. Mortality is a favorite obsession of Allen's. The questioning of the validity of organized religion, the afterlife, and the existence of God runs all through Allen's films. Basically atheistic, he says he understands "the urban Jewish mentality...of being racked with guilt and suffering, of feeling one step ahead of trouble and anxiety."<sup>15</sup> The holocaust is a favorite metaphor: "Life is a concentration camp. You're stuck here and there's no way out, and you can only rage impotently against your persecutors."<sup>16</sup>

True to form, however, his Jewish upbringing is fair game for a joke. A scene in ANNIE HALL employs a split-screen enabling Alvy Singer's Jewish, working class family to talk to Annie's more refined family. Both groups are at the dinner table. Annie's family is enjoying an Easter ham.

Mrs. Hall:                   How do you plan to spend the holidays,  
Mrs. Singer?

Mrs. Singer:               We fast.

Mr. Hall:                   Fast?

Mr. Singer:                Yeah, no food. You know, we have to  
atone for our sins.

Mrs. Hall:           What sins? I don't understand.

Mr. Singer:          To tell you the truth, neither do we.

Allen pokes fun at the blind following of religious ritual, but the joke is still a shield. The doubtful fear hides behind the laughter.

The shield is not, however, without frequent superficial barbs. A scene in HANNAH AND HER SISTERS finds Allen's Jewish hypochondriac character, Mickey, seeking big answers to big questions. The dialogue interlaces acidic jabs, reminiscent of Allen's comic idols, with desperate uncertainty:

Father Flynn:        Now why do you think that you would like to convert to Catholicism?

Mickey:              Well, uh, because, y-you know, I gotta have something to believe in, otherwise life is just meaningless.

Father Flynn:        I understand. But why did you make the decision to choose the catholic faith?

Mickey:              Tch. Well, you know....first of all, because it's a very beautiful religion. It's very well structured. Now I'm talking now, incidentally, about the-the, uh, against-school prayer, pro-abortion, anti-nuclear wing.

Father Flynn: So at the moment you don't believe in God.

Mickey: No. A-a-and I-I want to. You know, I'm willing to do anything. I'll, you know, I'll dye Easter eggs if it helps. I-I need some evidence. I gotta have some proof. Uh, you know, i-i-if I can't believe in God then I don't think life is worth living.

Allen's poking fun at organized religion stems from seeing the church as transparently hiding from, escaping from, *denying* the finality of death. The mysterious, unpredictable grim reaper always lurks, but he seems to accumulate overtime hovering over Woody Allen. Death runs through everything Allen writes, but the issue, of course, is not so large or dark as to be above the laugh--the grand escape:

- "The chief problem about death, incidentally, is the fear that there may be no afterlife - a depressing thought, particularly for those who have bothered to shave."<sup>17</sup>

- "Also, there is the fear that there is an afterlife but no one will know where it is being held."<sup>18</sup>

- "Death is an acquired trait."<sup>19</sup>

- "Dying doesn't make you thirsty. Unless you get stabbed after eating herring."<sup>20</sup>

Death's inevitability gives life a certain existentialism to Allen. Existence becomes pointless drudgery. Accordingly, ANNIE HALL, Allen's sixth major film, was originally entitled "Anhedonia" (the

inability to experience pleasure). Only after several editing sessions did the final film about a romantic relationship finally surface, but self-analyzing, binding doubts and questions still frequently emerge. The film portrays Allen's philosophy-influenced depressions running back into his childhood. One scene shows Alvy as a child worrying about the "big bang" theory. His mother takes him to the doctor who tells the boy not to worry--the universe won't be expanding for billions of years. "Thus," noted Pogel, "Allen traces Alvy's concern with unreliability to the age of seven, when he experienced full-fledged existential dread. His innocence is comprised by self-consciousness from a very early age."<sup>21</sup>

Young Alvy's mother dragging him to a doctor for guidance carries over into the adult Alvy's (and Allen's) seeing an analyst for most of his adult life.

Mrs. Hall:                 Annie tells us that you've been seeing a  
  psychiatrist for fifteen years.

Alvy:                         Yes. I'm making excellent progress.  
  Pretty soon when I lie down on his couch,  
  I won't have to wear the lobster bib.

The scene is funny, but it seems to reflect, perhaps, a certain embarrassment of Allen's. Alvy jokes about therapy, but Annie's mother doesn't see the humor; she just frowns. She wonders about this man her daughter has become involved with. Her refusal to laugh sustains the humor, but it also emphasizes the stigma associated with seeing a psychiatrist. The "lobster bib" is a diversion for Singer (and Allen). He coughs nervously when Mrs. Hall *confronts* him. He's taken back by her



frank inquiring about something he's reluctant to discuss with virtual strangers so he cracks a joke hoping it will divert the conversation away from any further discussion of his "problem". Once again, the joke is the shield.

The humor in ANNIE HALL, however, differs significantly from that of Allen's earlier films. As was mentioned in the introduction to this study, after SLEEPER, the filmmaker wanted to "do a deeper comedy...a more human film, comedy, but real person." ANNIE HALL earnestly reflects that desire. The humor in the film comes from within: the women problems and the mortality jokes. These are typical, everyday issues for Allen and he wanted to express the problems on a more personal level.

Thus, Allen's little man has become more accessible in ANNIE HALL. Instead of poking reality in the eyes with farce and parody, as in previous films, he places himself in the real world and lets it overwhelm him. Part of the originality of Allen's humor has always been based on self-analysis and self-ridicule. In ANNIE HALL, Allen takes that approach to new heights. We are far more sympathetic with Allen's contemporary character. We relate to the fumbings by Alvy and Annie to make the right initial impression in a relationship. We understand the nervousness of meeting parents, the frustrations of sexual compatibility (and/or incompatibility), and the difficulty of sustaining a mutually satisfying romantic relationship.

Allen's personalizing of comedy can be interpreted as maturation in that the filmmaker trusts his comedic talent enough to realize that he

doesn't have to look so hard or reach so far for material when it's right in his own backyard, or better yet, right inside of him. He doesn't have to rely on attacking an accepted form or playing a flippant Bob Hope-like character.

Another distinguishing, certainly mature, characteristic of ANNIE HALL's comedy is its reliance on dialogic humor. The visual comedy is now paired with, perhaps overshadowed by, funny conversation and monologue. The dialogic chemistry, especially between Keaton and Allen, enables Allen's wit to shine without the assistance of slapstick and sight gags.

The laughs in ANNIE HALL are plentiful, but a side-effect of self-awareness is the lessening of humor. As Pogel perceived:

In ANNIE HALL the narrator's self-consciousness is even more prominent; not just a film critic as in PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM, he is now a comic artist like the filmmaker himself, and the sophistication that was located primarily outside the narrator is internalized and has demoralized him to a greater extent than in earlier funnier movies. The little man's angst is examined more closely, and it is no longer only funny.<sup>22</sup>

ANNIE HALL began the movement into the darker side of Woody Allen's imagination. Right away, in the opening monologue, Allen makes it clear that, to him, life is "full of loneliness and misery and suffering and unhappiness, and it's all over much too quickly." To describe his relationships with women, he paraphrases the Groucho Marx joke: "I would never wanna belong to any club that would have someone like me for a member." Never has Allen been so overtly self-

critical and never has a Woody Allen film, despite its comedy, had such a negative tone. The film dissects the disintegration, rather than the blossoming, of a relationship. Annie and Alvy break up--period. There is no last-minute reconciliation or wedding or carefree stroll off into the sunset--just heartbreak, disillusionment, and disappointment. Boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy *doesn't* get girl back. LOVE AND DEATH ended with Allen's character's death (then, easily the darkest Allen ending yet), but the film's final shot shows him *dancing* as he walks away with the grim reaper, as if he's experiencing some sort of elated relief. Contrastingly, ANNIE HALL ends with a shot of late-afternoon Manhattan traffic while Allen's voice-over resignedly relates a joke about needing something not really attainable. The whiney little man to which the viewer had become attuned as a clown hits us with a cold, hard, much less funny, reality--an indication of things to come.

The dramatic INTERIORS, Allen's defiant follow-up to ANNIE HALL, saw the filmmaker leave comedy altogether, a move that irritated many critics and stunned audiences. The film allowed Allen the opportunity to grow and diversify.

He later told Diane Jacobs:

What so many people don't understand is that comedy is impossible if you can't do it, but it's no big deal if you can - it's just good luck. I can sit down in an afternoon and do a couple of pages for the New Yorker and start a script and write some jokes. If I'm on the film set and I have to revise a scene to make it funny, that's easy for me. But revising INTERIORS was very, very difficult. I was in completely unfamiliar waters.<sup>23</sup>

INTERIORS was completely stripped of comedy. Some critics responded by suggesting that the best dramas are leavened by wit - a criticism Allen couldn't swallow: "(That's) simply not true. Bergman's PERSONA is a truly great film, and there's not a comic moment in it."<sup>24</sup>

Graham McCann observed:

Allen seems determined to preserve a crude separation between 'solid' and 'light', 'serious' and 'comic'<sup>25</sup>... (He) seems unwilling even to consider any alternative view: his dogmatic insistence on the rigid boundaries of each category is not only unrealistic but is also something he, above all others, has contradicted in such works as MANHATTAN and HANNAH AND HER SISTERS--movies which move in and out of both comic and dramatic perspectives with unprecedented subtlety and sophistication.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps Allen's insistence on the superiority of drama as an art form and his need to stretch beyond the too-easily-attained, non-challenging art of comedy has, indeed, distorted his perspective. The "boundaries" between Allen's conceptions of comedy and drama *are* very "rigid" and, possibly, needlessly exclusive, but Woody Allen has made a successful career of writing and telling jokes. INTERIORS was a huge step for Allen. The filmmaker's quest for quality work made the experience overwhelming. Allen obviously felt intimidated by the task of writing and filming a pure drama. Comedy felt a bit shop-worn and, while he may have taken his comic talent for granted and too eagerly discounted the value of years in the comedy business, the newness of the nature of drama and the stark difference in attempting to conceive a

dramatic work magnified the distinction between the two art forms. The excitement and invigoration of discovery in "unfamiliar waters" paled overly familiar ground. Drama became important. Its challenge far outweighed that of comedy, but Allen was to neither forsake his comic art nor refuse to intertwine humor with drama.

MANHATTAN's blending of drama and comedy is less a contradiction than it is a confirmation of Allen's willingness to blur the distinctions between the two forms. After temporarily withdrawing from comedy, returning to it provided a fresh perspective. MANHATTAN brought the filmmaker back to romantic comedy, or better yet, romance with a twist of comedy. "I wanted to make," he explained, "a serious picture that had laughs in it."<sup>27</sup> Producer Charles H. Joffe called it: "A drama with comedy rather than a comedy with drama."<sup>28</sup>

If ANNIE HALL achieved a new maturity in Woody Allen's comedy, then MANHATTAN takes the development many steps farther. Allen continues to look inward, but with a different approach. No longer is he a stand-up on film, for example. His voice-over at the beginning of the film serves as a prefatory monologue echoing the familiar funny Allen ("Behind his black-rimmed glasses was the coiled sexual power of a jungle cat."), but after the cut to the interior at Elaine's where we are introduced to most of our cast, Allen never steps out of the fictional screen to talk directly to the audience as in ANNIE HALL. He remains Isaac Davis for the remainder of the film. The comic emphasis rests on the story and the interaction of the characters. Allen displays a trust, a confidence in his dialogic material that allows him the freedom to grow away from his comedic roots.

Another noticeable difference in Allen's comedic approach in **MANHATTAN** is the lessening of Jewish jokes and references. Jewish humor has always played a significant part in Allen's humor. It fits in nicely with his self-analyzing paranoia, helping to fill out Allen's 'little man' image. Vivian Gornick, in a 1976 Village Voice article, thoughtfully recalled Allen's stand-up routines in night-clubs nearly a decade before:

What was most striking about Allen's humor in those years is that this Jewish anxiety at the center of his wit touched something alive in America at that moment, and went out beyond us...It made Jews of gentiles...It meshed so perfectly with the deepest undercurrents of feeling in the national life that it made outsiders of us all.<sup>29</sup>

In every film up through **ANNIE HALL**, Jewish humor is the source of many jokes. In **TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN** (1969), Jewish words are used as in-jokes: a bank holdup involves a "shtick-up". In **BANANAS** (1971), the San Marcos dictator (Carlos Montalban) calls the UJA (United Jewish Appeal) for funds instead of the CIA. **EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SEX (BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK)** (1972), a film heavily laden with Jewish jokes, involves a scene where an old Rabbi gets to act out his "perversion" on a television show. While he is bound to a chair, a beautiful girl whips him while his wife, sitting beside him, eats pork. "Nowhere in his work", writes Lester D. Friedman, "is Allen's vision of the Jew as outsider clearer than in **SLEEPER**. Miles Monroe (Allen's character) is an alien in the world of 2173, a man whose Jewish sensibilities are literally out of

time and place."<sup>30</sup> LOVE AND DEATH, Allen's visualization of a Russian novel, while significantly advancing the filmmaker artistically, still resorted to a comic, Jewish perspective.

ANNIE HALL brought Allen's Jewish humor to a head with Alvy Singer--his most Jewish screen character. Alvy paranoically imagines television executives asking him, "Did Jew go to lunch yet?" when, of course, they're actually asking "Did you..?" Annie wonderfully staggers Alvy in a courtship scene when she innocently, but hilariously, brings up his Jewishness with all the tact of a freight train:

Annie:                   Well,uh...(Pausing) You're what  
                                  Grammy Hall would call a real Jew.

Alvy:                     Oh, thank you.

Annie:                   Yeah, well...you - She hates Jews. She  
                                  thinks that they just make money, but let  
                                  me tell ya, I mean, she's the one - yeah, is  
                                  she ever. I'm tellin' ya.

In a later scene, the camera looks subjectively at Alvy through Grammy Hall's eyes: he is dressed in the long black coat and hat of the Orthodox Jew, complete with moustache and long beard.

In Hollywood's Image of the Jew, Friedman applauds the cohesion of the Semitic humor in the film:

Like Paul Mazursky, who brought many of his thoughts about his own heritage together in NEXT STOP, GREENWICH VILLAGE, so too Allen's ANNIE HALL ties up many of the

loose strands about the comic's Jewishness into one artistically satisfying package.<sup>31</sup>

The Jewish humor in Allen's "more human" film is more personalized than in his previous work. He places the Semitic perspective into his childhood and reverberates it up through the present. The anxieties, because of the contemporary, somewhat autobiographical setting of the film, hit harder. We realize Jewish paranoia is very much a part of the Woody Allen persona and not just a comic tool used to enhance the "little man" image.

ANNIE HALL apparently allowed Allen to exhaust or sufficiently vent his Jewish anxieties through his humor. MANHATTAN contains only a few (four to be exact) Jewish jokes, revealing a writer who is more at ease with himself--comic whose maturation finds him disliking himself a little less and accepting Jewishness as a part of life rather than a curse. Isaac is still very much an outsider, but his alienation stems from victimizing circumstances and turns of events rather than self-image.

Allen's stalwart 'little man' screen persona is no longer the schlemiel--the schlep. Of course, terrible things happen to Isaac. His ex-wife, who is now raising their son with another woman, writes a book about their debacle of a marriage (with possible movie rights no less), one lover leaves him for his married best friend, and the other lover, whom he finally realizes he really does love, leaves for London. Whereas Alvy Singer would have shriveled under so much ill fate, Isaac shows more backbone. True to the Allen comic persona, he still whines in self-pity, but he faces his troubles head-on. He angrily confronts his ex-wife about



her revealing book. He pulls his best friend away from his work to berate him for adultery and stealing his lover:

(In a vacant classroom where skeletons hang for study)  
 But you - you're too easy on yourself, don't you see that? You know, you...you - that's your problem, that's your whole problem. You - you rationalize everything. You're not honest with yourself. You talk about...you wanna - you wanna write a book, but - but, in the end, you'd rather buy the Porsche, you know, or you cheat a little bit on Emily, and you play around the truth a little with me...Jesus - well, what are future generations gonna say about us? My God! (He points to the skeleton, acknowledging it at last) You know, someday, we're gonna - we're gonna be like him! I mean, you know - well, he was probably one of the beautiful people. He was probably dancing and playing tennis and everything. And - and - (Pointing to the skeleton again) and now - well, this is what happens to us! You know, uh, it's very important to have - to have some kind of personal integrity. You know, I'll - I'll be hanging in a classroom one day. And - and I wanna make sure when I...thin out that I'm well thought of!

Alvy Singer would never have made a similar speech. He was unable to fathom death, much less look beyond it. Isaac Davis, though, unlike previous Allen screen characters, *stands up*--an indication that the filmmaker's confidence and maturing self-image no longer hides behind the 'schlemiel' for laughs. The little man and his world are still funny, but he's less pitiful. He's more believable, less a caricature.

Isaac personifies a continuing trend toward a more realistic humor. Whereas the younger Woody Allen used humor to hide or escape from reality, the more mature filmmaker employs comedy to *understand* reality. The world used to devour the 'little man'. Now, he's pointing a finger back in self-defense with a firmer, wiser stance. Self-analysis and alienation still persist, but with much less deprecation.

Intellectuality plays a recurring role in Allen's brand of humor. Well-read, especially in philosophy, Allen consistently refers to, satirizes, and even portrays the pseudo-intellectual who delights in cerebral chest-beating. He makes funny and ridiculous the transparent erudition which assumes superiority.

Allen's use of intellectuality as a comedic device is paradoxical. Characters, including his own, are usually articulate and educated. Writers, photographers, teachers, and the like, they effortlessly rattle off references to novelists, foreign filmmakers, and philosophers. Even Alvy's one-night stand (Shelley Duvall) in ANNIE HALL, who Allen draws as a bit empty-headed, post-coitally remarks: "Oh, sex with you is really a Kafka-esque experience...I mean that as a compliment." Allen assumes the audience knows that Kafka's writings are death-oriented. But, while Allen relies on erudition for laughs, thereby flashing his own bookishness, he consistently takes satirical pokes at intellectuality.

Allen constantly asks big questions. The possible threat of the meaninglessness of life threads his work persistently. He obsesses with death. Books on philosophy and existentialism are an out--great minds attempting to answer the unanswerable help relieve the seemingly insular anxiety of mortality--but, in Allen's case, only temporarily, for,

conversely, he suspects phoniness and, perhaps, escapism, not only in philosophy, but in higher education and the smokescreening that articulate lucidity can provide. This suspicion reflects onto the screen recurringly through Allen's unique brand of dialogic humor, most noticeably in the post-SLEEPER films. "You know, it's one thing about intellectuals," says Alvy in ANNIE HALL, "they prove that you can be absolutely brilliant and have no idea what's going on." In LOVE AND DEATH, Allen (Boris) and Diane Keaton (Sonja) banter pseudo-philosophically:

- Sonja:                   Immorality is subjective.
- Boris:                    Yes, but subjectivity is objective.
- Sonja:                   Not in any rational scheme of perception.
- Boris:                    Perception is irrational - it implies  
imminence.
- Sonja:                    But judgment of any system or any apriori  
relationship of phenomena exists in any  
rational, or metaphysical, or at least  
epistemological contradiction to an  
abstract and empirical concept such as  
being, or to be, or to occur in the thing  
itself, or of the thing itself.
- Boris:                    Yeah, I've said that many times.

Just as Allen suspects organized religion of being an artificial shield used to hide from the big questions, he similarly sees intellectuality as a potentially protective veneer. Allen's humor is of timely anxiety and nervous self-analysis. His characters, post-SLEEPER especially, are constantly feeling each other out in an attempt to find out who they *themselves* are. These neurotic New Yorkers, educated as they may be, become so immersed in presenting the right image that they tend to hide *behind* culture, rather than absorb it, fulfilling, in its true perspective. In a memorably funny scene in ANNIE HALL, Alvy and Annie are just getting to know each other over a couple of glasses of wine. They're both anxious and Alvy finds himself hiding behind words. Subtitles (parenthesized here) reveal their true thoughts as they talk:

Alvy:                   Photography's interesting, you know, it's  
- it's a new art form, and a, uh, a set of  
aesthetic criteria have not emerged yet. (*I  
wonder what she looks like naked?*)

Annie:                 Aesthetic criteria? You mean whether  
it's a good photo or not? (*I'm not smart  
enough for him. Hang in there.*)

Alvy:                   The-the medium enters in as a condition  
of the art form itself. That's- (*I don't  
know what I'm saying - she senses I'm  
shallow.*)

Annie: Well, well, I...to me-it's-it's-it's all instinctive, you know. I mean, I just try to uh, feel it, you know? I try to get a sense of it and not think about it so much. *(God, I hope he doesn't turn out to be a schmuck like the others.)*

Alvy: Still, still we - You need a set of aesthetic guide lines to put it in social perspective, I think. *(Christ, I sound like FM radio. Relax.)*

Intellectuality becomes a superficial mask. Enlightenment takes the form of shallow, narcissistic pomposity--and Allen makes it funny by letting the phoniness speak for itself.

If ANNIE HALL brought Allen's Jewish humor to a head, then MANHATTAN does likewise with his use of intellectuality as a comedic device. Mary Wilke (Diane Keaton), for example, takes Allen's satirical intellectuality to a new dimension. Her highbrow attitude is introduced as arrogance, but as the film goes on, her character unravels and we see past the intellectual facade.

Mary, she won't hesitate to mention, is well-educated, but her erudite posturing, though never-ending, is, at once, humorously pompous (she pronounces Van Gogh:"Van Goch", as if coughing up phlegm), frequently misguided (her dachshund is a Freudian "penis substitute"), desperately self-reassuring ("I'm highly intelligent...I could

go to bed with the entire faculty of M.I.T. if I wanted to."), and ultimately transparent (she novelizes films because "it's easy and it pays well.").

Whereas in pre-MANHATTAN films, Allen used intellectuality primarily to muster a laugh, now he expands the device in order to enhance character depth. One of the ironies in MANHATTAN is that the only real non-intellectual major character ends up being the wisest - the least flaky. Tracy (Mariel Hemingway) is Isaac's seventeen-year old lover who Allen draws as being justifiably naive, but with a heart of gold. Isaac enjoys her attention, but hastily and regrettably dismisses their relationship to take up with Mary. At the very end of the film, as Tracy is saying goodbye to Isaac, she tells him: "Look, you have to have a little faith in people." All he can do is stare back at her in bafflement. Her simple philosophy, he realizes, has eluded him *and* the other characters.

MANHATTAN furthered Allen's metamorphic maturation significantly. The filmmaker showed more trust in his comedic skills by exchanging the belly-laughs for smiles raised by meaningful observation of the human condition.

After MANHATTAN, Allen continued his filmmaking prolificity. His next film, STARDUST MEMORIES (1980), his most autobiographical to date, experimented heavily with Fellini homage. In 1987, Allen called it the "best film I ever did, really."<sup>32</sup> A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S SEX COMEDY (1982), about three couples who spend a revelational weekend in the countryside, is set in upstate New York around 1906: "I saw it as a chance to get in some of my philosophy, that there's more to life than meets the eye."<sup>33</sup> ZELIG (1983) mocked the documentary superbly. BROADWAY DANNY ROSE (1984), a low key but charming genre piece,

featured Allen as a second-rate booking agent and Mia Farrow as a gum-popping cheap blonde. *THE PURPLE ROSE OF CAIRO* (1985), set during the Great Depression, developed the filmmaker's ensemble writing and thematic maturation with a "movie within a movie" concept complete with an actor actually *leaving* the screen to join Mia Farrow's character in the audience.

*HANNAH AND HER SISTERS* (1986) brought Allen back to contemporary Manhattan romantic comedy reminiscent of *ANNIE HALL* and *MANHATTAN*. The intricate narrative echoes the familiar themes: the search for and the fading of love with the big gnawing metaphysical questions.

Comedically, *HANNAH AND HER SISTERS* is a compendium--an anthology of sorts. The varietal humor harks back to familiar Allen devices, but with a confidence which only comes from experience. There is the worrisome hypochondriac, Mickey Sachs (Allen), whose ontological angst deludes him--a cross between Allan Felix and Alvy Singer; there is visual humor (a shop window picture of Christ, for example, whose eyes open and close as one rocks back and forth); and there is *MANHATTAN*-ish serious comedy, easily found in the tone of the film. Graham McCann lauds:

*Hannah* is a remarkable example of sophisticated screen comedy, and in terms of Allen's own *oeuvre*, it represents the flowering of the 'serious comedy' style that he had spent the previous decade developing. *Hannah* seems to bring together the various threads Allen had been spinning since the *Love and Death* period, and weaves them into a mature and

densely-textured tapestry, which balances perfectly between the poles of tragedy and comedy. New York, art, personal integrity, intimations of mortality, the cunning of desire, intellectual uncertainty, ontological insecurity - all these themes are present, interwoven with a restrained comic feel that points up the seriousness of things as it offers balm to soothe that seriousness.<sup>34</sup>

HANNAH AND HER SISTERS continues the little man's self-analysis so consciously developed in ANNIE HALL, yet poisonously carries on the outwardly-aimed self-defense of Isaac Davis in MANHATTAN. HANNAH's subtler humor lies in the romantic and familial relationships while Mickey's predicament, on the other side of the dichotomous narrative, juxtaposes the belly laughs of a younger Allen. HANNAH AND HER SISTERS, therefore, reveals a comedic maturity found in the willingness to combine different types of humor. In Allen's previous films, he opted for a mood or a tone and settled into it - seldom, if ever, violating comedic parameters set up by that particular film. With HANNAH, Allen writes his comedy with less restraint, trusting his filmmaking instincts and experience to give the humor cohesion.

Like Alvy Singer, Mickey Sachs is plagued by the big questions. Like Allan Felix, he's a hopeless hypochondriac. He's worried stiff - and he's funny. Mickey suspects melanoma when a spot *on his shirt* appears on his back. He tells the doctor he's losing his hearing, but he can't remember in which ear. Of course, there is nothing wrong with his health. Upon finding this out, the little man ecstatically dances down the



street only to instantly be thrown into deep philosophical despair about mortality. "Do you realize," Mickey asks his co-worker, "what a thread we're all hanging by?" Hence, the worrier switches into intellectual mode enabling Allen to take his clearest, and funniest, shots at religion and intellectuality. One of the thirteen scene-introducing title cards in HANNAH reads: "The only absolute knowledge attainable by man is that life is meaningless. - Tolstoy." Cut to an exterior shot of a university library. Mickey emerges from its depths, pondering. His voice-over:

Millions of books written on every conceivable subject by all these great minds, and in the end, none of `em knows anything more about the big questions of life than I do. I read Socrates. You know, this guy used to knock off little Greek boys. What the hell's he got to teach me? And Nietzsche with his Theory of Eternal Recurrence. He said that the life we live, we're gonna live over and over again the exact same way for eternity. Great. That means I'll have to sit through the Ice Capades again. Tch. It's not worth it. And Freud, another great pessimist. Jeez, I was in analysis for years. Nothing happened. My poor analyst got so frustrated. The guy finally put in a salad bar.

Never has Allen been so direct. The satirical pokes in ANNIE HALL and MANHATTAN have graduated to unbridled jabs. The doubts and distrusts, though laced with humor, are more acidic than ever.

Allen's attack on religion is equally unbridled, with visual humor and one-liners reminiscent of ANNIE HALL throwing the punches. Mickey, for example, considers converting to Catholicism to more easily

deal with his mortal fears. After he shops for the necessary implements, he returns home with a picture of Christ, a crucifix, a loaf of white bread, and a jar of mayonnaise. Following a discussion about religious alternatives with a Krishna leader, Mickey comically comes to his senses: "Who are you kidding? You're gonna be a Krishna? You're gonna shave your head and put on robes and dance around at airports? You'll look like Jerry Lewis."

The Jewish humor returns in HANNAH, however, with a noticeable lightness. Mickey's father: "How the hell do I know why there were Nazis? I don't know how the can opener works." After a miserable date, Mickey tells his companion, "...I had a great time tonight, really. It was like the Nuremburg trials." Even when the brooding artist, Frederick (Max Von Sydow), editorializes about a television show on Auschwitz ("More gruesome film clips...and more puzzled intellectuals declaring their mystification over the systematic murder of millions."), the heaviness is brief and Von Sydow's character is almost caricatural in his intellectual pomposity.

The lessening of Jewish humor in MANHATTAN indicated Allen was feeling more at ease with his Semitism, his grievances less gnawing. The Jewish references in HANNAH AND HER SISTERS do not indicate a returning of those grievances as much as they signal a coming to terms with them. The humor in HANNAH approaches reflexivity. Allen reacquaints us with his neurotic little man, the futility of the big questions, the longing for definitive love, *and* Semitic paranoia, but the anxieties, however heartfelt, seem obligatory, complementing the anthological feel of the comedy in the film. Thus, the Semitic satire in

HANNAH AND HER SISTERS is less angry. Whereas Annie Hall's grandmother *hated* Jews, and Isaac Davis cracked, "But physical force is always better with Nazis, uh...because it's hard to satirize a guy with shiny boots on", Mickey Sachs throws out the occasional Semitic aside. Even when Sachs' Jewishness comes into focus, as he wrestles with theological answers to ontological questions, his upbringing is referred to matter-of-factly (" 'cause I was born that way"). HANNAH shows us Allen's acceptance of being Jewish in that, while he doesn't exactly exhibit Semitic pride, he shows it to be no more of an embarrassment than Catholicism, Krishnaism, or Buddhism. All the -isms are, through Alen's eyes, simply desperate attempts to answer the unanswerable--or the questions have too many answers and they all seem equally futile.

For every person, though, there might just be an appropriate justification. The ground-breaking optimism in HANNAH AND HER SISTERS fittingly reveals itself through comedy--film comedy. Demoralized and still finding no answers, Mickey slumps into a movie theatre seat to find himself taken in by the spectacle on the screen (The Marx Brothers' DUCK SOUP):

...the movie was a film that I'd seen many times in my life since I was a kid, and I always loved it. And, you know, I'm watching these people up on the screen, and I started getting hooked on the film...And I started to feel how can you even *think* of killing yourself? I mean, isn't it so stupid? I mean, look at all the people up there on the screen. You know, they're really funny, and, what if the worst *is* true? What if

there's no God, and you only go around once and that's it?

Well, you know, *don't you want to be a part of the experience?*

The simplest, most obvious, things are often the most elusive.

There is no irony in the fact that Mickey Sachs would find answers in the ability to laugh. Uncharacteristic of Woody Allen's work though it may be, the revelation represents, as does the film as a whole, a growing up--a gladdened resignation that comes with years, a stupefying discovery of the essence of existence, an awakening to the basics. With HANNAH AND HER SISTERS, Woody Allen has *finally* learned to relax and enjoy the ride.

## CHAPTER III

### NARRATIVE

The opening credits fade to a medium close-up of Alvy Singer standing in front of a flat pastel backdrop. He looks into the camera: "There's an old joke..." ANNIE HALL begins reflexively with Allen whining about the meaninglessness of life, death, and getting old. He pauses, sighs, then says, "Annie and I broke up and I-I still can't get my mind around that. You know, I-I keep sifting the pieces of the relationship through my mind and-and examining my life and tryin' to figure out where did the screw-up come..."

Functionally, Alvy's monologue resembles Charles Foster Kane dropping the orb from his deathbed and whispering "Rosebud". The end is the beginning. Kane is dead; Alvy and Annie have broken up. The destination has been disclosed; the trip is still a mystery. After their opening sequences, CITIZEN KANE and ANNIE HALL both flashback reconstructively, but while KANE flashes back chronologically, ANNIE HALL flashes back in a more temporally fragmented way.

"Sifting the pieces of the relationship through my mind" is a key phrase in describing ANNIE HALL's narrative structure. Thomas Schatz has observed that, "ANNIE HALL, we realize early on, is 'about' how we tell stories, how we remember relationships and our past, how we impose our rational minds on the happenstance of experience."<sup>35</sup> When one

recalls past experiences, the order of events often fall in "pieces", not chronologically. Annie and Alvy's relationship is strewn all over the screen in an adventurous and ambitious effort to relate the story of a doomed love affair.

The first act (twenty scenes) of ANNIE HALL, "derives", as Schatz points out, "exclusively from the associative standup comedy format; the organizing principle is the narrator's past life, with the sequences flowing in a veritable stream of comic consciousness."<sup>36</sup> The narrator's (Allen's) presence ruptures the narrative with such consistent pervasiveness, the film-watching experience becomes impossible to ignore. After the opening monologue, the film flashes back to Alvy's childhood where, as an adult, he literally sits in on his grade school classroom. His classmates comically describe their future occupations to the viewer. There are camera-directed asides, the magical appearance of Marshall McLuhan as needed, and the visiting of Annie's old boyfriends via split-screen. This type of text can be called "modernist" as opposed to traditional or classical. As Schatz differentiates:

The term modernist is generally assigned to any narrative which manifests a certain degree of self-awareness--or in more fashionable parlance, or self reflexivity--regarding the narrative, thematic, or formal conventions at work in the circuit of discourse in which it is communicated. Modernism is opposed to one of several terms--traditional, classical, realist, conventional--which designates a narrative system whose function is to conceal its codes (its formal and narrative

conventions) and sustain a hermetically closed, logically consistent formally transparent fictional world.<sup>37</sup>

The associative "modernist" narrative of the first act, with its temporal wandering and omnipresent narrator, paints a fun picture, but thinly disguises a singular point of view as well. Aside from reflecting Alvy's mental process, the technique places the viewer in a more sympathetic relationship with the character, not only seeing *what* he perceives, but *how* he perceives. Alvy, his story tells us, is a good guy who's been given a series of bad breaks. Raised nerve-frayingly under a roller coaster, his teachers were monsters, his first wife was more interested in social-climbing than feeding her husband's healthy sex drive, his second wife whimpered him into abstinence, and now Annie has simply turned on him.

The second act, the courtship, changes point of view considerably, however, as the narrative switches from a modernist to a classical approach. The act begins when Alvy is introduced to Annie for the first time. From that point through the next twenty scenes, the narrative settles into a linear pattern. Narration becomes noticeably invisible. There are no camera-directed asides, voice-overs, impositions, or temporal flashes. Allen/Alvy the narrator steps aside and Alvy Singer simply becomes a character. The window-screen clears, reflexivity subsides, and the narrative eases the viewer into subjective empathy.

The narrative at this point still reflects Alvy's psyche, but differently. He's falling in love. He's at ease with himself and the world. He's in a rare Allen-character state of mind: he's happy. Alvy, writes Schatz, "enjoys the only respite of unselfconsciousness in the film...we

are at our highest level of emotional and empathetic engagement with Alvy and Annie Hall as fictional characters and with the dramatic stakes of their relationship."<sup>38</sup>

Of course, as Alvy explained at the outset, he and Annie break up. With their first separation, Allen leans back into a modernist narrative as Alvy's self-consciousness rises again. Signs of dissolution appear as early as the pivotal dinner scene where Alvy meets Annie's family. At the table, over Easter ham, Grammy Hall, "The Jew Hater", sees Alvy through a subjective camera: he wears a long black coat and hat with a moustache and beard. Moments later, Alvy looks into the camera and says, "I can't believe this family...they really look American, you know, very healthy and...like they never get sick or anything. Nothing like my family...you know, the two are like oil and water." The seams in the relationship start to show. The couple's differences (their upbringings, for example, as the sequence reveals) begin affecting Alvy's peace of mind. Accordingly, he looks self-consciously into the camera. Seams in the classical narrative text of the second act also start to show, signaling a slip back into the original associative approach and the beginning of the third act--the dissolution of the relationship.

"You followed me. I can't believe it!" Annie discovers Alvy has been "spying" on her. They argue heatedly in the street. The scene is followed by a flashback to a less volatile but illuminating incident when Annie returned from her first therapy session to tell Alvy how the analyst related one of her dreams to Alvy's being a smothering influence. Again, Alvy throws an aside to the camera. Now, however, the break in narrative is more distracting, another signal of the narrative transition.



In contrast to the dinner table aside, which was simply an observation, Alvy now takes sides with the viewer: "She said, 'Will it change my wife.' You heard that because you were there so I'm not crazy." Cut back to the argument in the street, which intensifies to the point of Annie shouting, "I just think we ought to call this relationship quits!" and storming off. Alvy's state of mind scrambles. Reflexively, the narrative becomes chaotic: Alvy turns immediately to complain to the viewer and then to strangers in the street (including a horse) for advice.

Things are never the same between Alvy and Annie. The narrative never slips back into invisible tranquility as when the relationship flourished. There is a temporary reconciliation, but, for the remainder of the film, the narrative winds through cartoon animation, split-screens, voice-overs, and temporal flashes. The directorial techniques reflect Alvy's self-consciousness as he returns to his miserable state.

ANNIE HALL's narrative was a breakthrough for Allen. He intended the film to be more "human - comedy but real person." The contemporary thematic setting and the mind's eye telling of the story help to achieve that intent. Additionally, the narrational pervasiveness and liberties taken with the conventions of the medium were without precedent in Allen's earlier films.

Structurally, ANNIE HALL is deceptively tight, for beneath the rambling narrative lies a cohesive scheme. Maurice Yacowar noticed that "The unity in Allen's masterpiece, ANNIE HALL, is his most sophisticated, for in addition to thematic continuities there is also a firmly organized structure."<sup>39</sup> Yacowar describes how the double perspective (Alvy's and Annie's) climaxes at different points in the film:

From Annie's viewpoint the climaxes occur at exactly one-third through the film's run and at two-thirds through it. Both are musical interludes that define the stages in her professional development...from Alvy's perspective, the narrative reaches climax at each quarter. In each scene the couple is defined in various forms of division (the tennis game, the Easter dinner, and the split-screen psychiatrist offices).<sup>40</sup>

Film editor Ralph Rosenblum, who significantly helped shape the film, wrote:

The (original cut, approximately two and a half hours long) was like a visual monologue, a more sophisticated and more philosophical version of TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN. Its stream-of-consciousness continuity, rambling commentary, and bizarre gags completely obscured the skeletal plot.<sup>41</sup>

The opening monologue was originally very long and Annie appeared only briefly. The intended focus of the film was not a love story. It was, as Rosenblum put it, "the surreal and abstract adventures of a neurotic Jewish comedian who was reliving his highly flawed life and in the process satirizing much of our culture"<sup>42</sup>. It eventually became clear, however, that the romantic relationship with Annie invariably brought the film to life, so Allen and Rosenblum began to cut in that direction. "ANNIE HALL received intensive editorial attention", wrote Rosenblum, "but it was not 'saved' in the cutting room. The job with (the film) was, as Eisenstein said, to allow the filmed material to guide you."<sup>43</sup>

Allen evidently needed help organizing ANNIE HALL and Ralph Rosenblum is partly responsible for the artistic and commercial success

of the film, but the "stream of consciousness" nucleus of the narrative, more than anything else, gives the movie its poignancy. From the opening monologue, we realize Alvy is agonizing over the loss of Annie. The modernist narrative's ability to plant the viewer in Alvy's brain brings one that much closer to the actual experience. The resulting effect strikes a nerve very near home. Rosenblum writes:

Despite the intensity of the hurts and sorrows, audiences found ANNIE HALL very funny; and perhaps because for the first time Woody dealt with issues that were very close to their hearts, this movie has made him one of the foremost directors in America today. It was a story told with great wit and humor, which generated more continuous laughter than any previous Allen film, and with a denouement that left many viewers in tears.<sup>44</sup>

The rambunctious narrative, the technical effects, and the timely subject matter of ANNIE HALL revealed a filmmaker exploring and manipulating his medium. The film proved to be a launching pad for tenacity and fecundity, but Allen, while surely absorbing the confidence-instilling success of his work, followed his own instincts, putting limited stock in what critics said and how his audience reacted. For the moment, continuing the learning process meant a re-examination of technique, part of which entailed shelving the standup-oriented, stream-of-consciousness narrative and reevaluating the significance of frame content and stylization.

1979 brought the filmmaker back to subtler romantic comedy and, simultaneously, a more vivacious New York. The INTERIORS venture

had proved beneficial: Allen's visual and thematic expansion enabled the realization of new artistic potential. *MANHATTAN*, however, showed a freshly developed visual style and a textual depth not found in his earlier films. The character breadth and the increasingly complex relationships coupled with the romantically black-and-whitened, Gershwin-ized, Cinemascope urban landscape helped to reaffirm the potential of restless maturation.

One aspect of Allen's growth, easily seen in *MANHATTAN*, is the expansion of his cast. Up through *ANNIE HALL*, Allen only developed a couple of relatively rounded characters in each film--usually his character and a female companion. Other characters were brought in, of course, but they only served to complement the protagonist. *INTERIORS* confidently progressed toward the ensemble style by revealing the complex personalities of a disintegrating family. The small cast of only eight characters in the film added to the family's insularity, but the film explored individual personalities in detail.

*MANHATTAN* continues the ensemble progression by developing a larger central cast *and* adding the usual supporting characters. Isaac, the protagonist, naturally becomes the primary point-of-view character, but Mary, Tracy, and Yale are also developed. Their motives, strengths, and weaknesses become familiar ground. Isaac's son, his ex-wife Jill and her lover, Yale's wife Emily, and Mary's ex-husband have small parts, but they are significant in that they help to reveal more about the main characters.

Allen's more muscular writing ability in *MANHATTAN* is not only evident in the expansion of the central cast, but also in the increasing

depth of the characters. "(Allen) created a film", writes Douglas Brode, "that emotionally involves us with totally believable, fully realized, finely drawn characters..."<sup>45</sup> In ANNIE HALL, Alvy was basically a one-dimensional character who, by film's end, was as neurotic and confused and self-centered as when the film began. He tried to change Annie, to mold her in his own image, but she grew away from him. External influences shaped Annie, not Alvy. True, he introduced her to adult education and analysis, but they only helped Annie to recognize a larger world less Alvy. A taste of California and moderate success as a singer brought her to realize Alvy's selfish, suffocating ways and her sense of self.

In MANHATTAN, however, characters affect each other with complex, ambiguous personae. By the film's end, Isaac, an expansion of Alvy, is a noticeably changed man--a transformation resulting from interaction with the other characters. Tracy, the young naif Isaac dismisses for older, "more mature" Mary, ultimately prevails with wisdom. At the end of the picture when Tracy refuses to take him back, she tells him, "You've got to have a little faith in people". An over-the-shoulder shot of Alvy reveals widened eyes. Ironically, this eighteen-year old, twenty-five years his junior, has been the simplest, truest source of enlightenment for him. His influence on *her*, however, has been a hardening one. The final scene reveals a mature young woman.

Isaac has a grounding influence on Mary, a hip, highly-educated, narcissistic woman. She recognizes that he sees through her arrogant veneer, lowers her facade and opens up, making room for vulnerability.

MANHATTAN's characters' effects on each other and their individual transformational capabilities gives them a quality not found in earlier Woody Allen films. Of course, the first films were little more than a series of loosely joined gag sequences which left little room for character development. Even as late as ANNIE HALL and INTERIORS, though, when psyche was a focal point, characters were affected more by their experiences than by each other. MANHATTAN deals with ethical polarities, a subject that allows Allen to take a more intense look at human emotions and interactions. The film's character depth and development greatly enhances the perceptive examination of the contemporary human condition.

The setting for that examination is integral to the film's narrative. Allen's affinity for the island of Manhattan stems from his childhood. "I first came to the city in 1941 with my father," he says, "and I was in love with it from the second I came up from the subway into Times Square."<sup>46</sup> As Graham McCann points out:

Allen's treatment of New York is clearly an overtly subjective one. He adopts a perspective, and invites us to share it with him. Such openness is significant, for it guides us towards the distinctive relationship between the author and his environment...The manner of the opening alerts us to the fact that what we are about to witness is Woody Allen's Manhattan, and no other.<sup>47</sup>

MANHATTAN is no nostalgia piece, however. "I like to think that, a hundred years from now," Allen told Natalie Gittelsohn, "if people see the picture, they will learn something about what life in the city was like

in the nineteen-seventies."<sup>48</sup> The black-and-white photography, a first in Allen's visual repertoire, is meant to show New York through Isaac's old-fashioned eyes. This is announced at the beginning of the film with the Gershwin score and the fireworks over a sprawling cityscape. Isaac's voice-over at the beginning, though, announces another aspect of Allen's intent: "he saw New York as a metaphor for the decay of contemporary culture." While New York is shown to be vibrant and glamorous, there are also the shots of construction work, the congestion, and the smog. The duality complements the narrative perfectly, for while 43-year old Isaac's view of New York is charmingly anachronistic, he is not blinded to the harsher realities of contemporary society. In fact, his "older" moral and ethical sensibilities serve as the plot-producing source of tension with the other self-serving, narcissistic characters.

MANHATTAN advanced the director's visual style tremendously. Not only was the film Allen's most elegant to date photographically, but the attention to mise-en-scene and the use of master shots became priorities.

ANNIE HALL, Allen's first collaboration with cinematographer Gordon Willis, revealed considerable attention to photographic detail. Allen aimed to "develop graphics and not just shoot functionally."<sup>49</sup> The New York scenes, where Alvy feels at home, contain warmth and sharpness in color. Conversely, California, where Alvy feels repulsed and alienated, looks annoyingly bright and glaring. The flashbacks to Alvy's childhood have a yellowish, photo-album look.

INTERIORS was the first Allen film to show a real concern for space. Allen wanted to convey starkness and emptiness to enhance the

coldness of his characters. The meticulous, ice-queen mother of the family (Geraldine Page) decorated her interiors with calculated austerity: annoyingly persistent earth tones (omnipresent beige), empty wall space, and cold, uncarpeted, sprawling wooden floors. Between scenes, the camera often perused perfectly composed, yet miserably vacant rooms of the family's house. The absence of music also communicated an aural sparseness, accentuating the rupture of cold silence by the dialogue and the lack of emotional push so easily provided by even the slightest score.

With *MANHATTAN*, Allen "integrated things more,...It's like a mixture of what I was trying to do with *ANNIE HALL* and *INTERIORS*."<sup>50</sup> Just as his investigation of drama helped deepen his comedy, it also broadened his visual perspective. To look at *MANHATTAN* is to visit his previous films' progeny. Richard Schickel summarized:

...Allen lets the long scenes play without break, without even a close-up or a reverse angle intruding. Variation comes from movement within the frame; sometimes, in fact, the actor moves right out of it, keeps talking off camera then reappears. When a director trusts his material that much, he encourages the audience to trust it as well.<sup>51</sup>

Languorous master shots, as in a scene at Isaac's apartment, find the camera unobtrusively observing an entire room in a long shot. Tracy reclines on the sofa to the far left of the screen while Isaac descends a spiral staircase on the far right. He walks to her, trying to dissuade her from making a serious commitment to him. She questions him and he gently escorts her up the staircase out of the frame. Two minutes pass



during one static shot. The eye moves within the frame and one *listens*, with fewer visual distractions, to what the characters are saying. Trust in the material, indeed. Eric Lax comments on the effect of Allen's master shots:

Most films, especially those made by American directors, are a melange of long shots, close-ups, and over-the-shoulder shots that cut back and forth between the actors. It allows the director to choose between a variety of readings and camera angles in compiling a scene, but the result is choppy in comparison to a master. Woody's films are a succession of scenes in which the people and the camera move to capture all the angle he wants. It is a graceful and technically difficult way to shoot; it requires technicians and actors to get every move and word right over a period of as long as five minutes.<sup>52</sup>

Mia Farrow, Allen's longtime companion and actress in many of his films enjoys the technique:

His wonderful masters are one of the things I respect about his directing. They look great, it's fun to do them, and you never have the tedium that you get in other filmmaking where you're doing the scene again and again and you have to watch your gestures from every angle.<sup>53</sup>

Another visual device which forces the viewer to listen is off-camera dialogue, something Woody flirted with in ANNIE HALL at Gordon Willis's encouragement, but explores more effectively in MANHATTAN. Additionally, to emphasize the off-screen dialogue, the frame usually contains little or nothing--a blank wall or an empty room. Another scene

in the film involves Isaac and Mary walking through a planetarium where light is sparse.

Isaac: No, no - you rely too much on your brain. It's a...the brain is the most overrated organ, I think. (The film goes black as Isaac and Mary leave Saturn and walk through one of the exhibit corridors. Their voices are heard in the dark; their forms take a dim shape in the gloom as they pass in and out of some spotlighted areas.)

Mary: (Offscreen) I know, you-you probably think I'm too cerebral.

Isaac: (Offscreen) Well, you are, (Sighing) you know, kind of on the brainy side. (Chuckling) Oh, what's the difference what I think about you? God knows what you must think about me. (Isaac's form is dimly seen in the gloom.)

- Mary: (Talking in the dim shadows, her form seen on the screen) No, I think you're fine. Are you kidding? (Once again, Mary and Isaac walk offscreen as they pass through the exhibit.)
- Mary: (Offscreen) I mean, you do have a - a tendency to get a little hostile, but I find that attractive.
- Isaac: (Offscreen) Oh, yeah? Well, I'm glad you do. (They stand now in close profile, backlit by hundreds of stars, a replica of space.)
- Mary: So, you think I have no feelings, is that it?
- Isaac: Oh, well - you - I...You're so sensitive. Jesus, I never said that. (Mary sighs) That doesn't...I think you're terrific. Really, I think, you know, I - I just...
- Mary: Yeah, well...
- Isaac: You're very insecure. I think - I really think you're wonderful, really.

The planetarium sequence clearly reveals Allen's developing sense of the usage of light and composition to convey the subtleties and the underlying meanings of actions and dialogue. The sequence is a turning point: Isaac and Mary, after oil-and-water first impressions, are starting to warm to each other. In their bumbling, stammering ways, they try to express their mutual attraction. Their guards drop only halfway, but sparks start to flicker. The planetarium surroundings (huge planets and fields of stars) lend to the another-world sensation one feels when a romantic relationship buds. The astral setting also provides a tranquilizing contrast to the thunderstorm from which the couple has just frantically escaped. In the dark, Mary and Isaac search for each other through conversation. At first, they are invisible, but not inaudible. The absence of visual distraction demands attentive listening. As the conversation starts to thaw, light gently breaks the darkness to profile the couple's forms. Seconds later, when Isaac nearly wears his heart on his sleeve, a close-up profiles their silhouetted faces close to each other. A background of tiny stars sparingly provides soft, romantic light. For a moment, the universe stands still as the couple become aware of nothing but each other. Visually, the scene relies heavily on contrast--a distinct advantage of black and white photography.

Another scene in which Allen employs communicative *mise-en-scene* takes place in Isaac's apartment when his and Mary's relationship is about to disintegrate. Isaac lays on the bed writing while Mary types briskly in another room. The camera sits in the hallway, peering around corners at the two of them as they converse. As Isaac expresses his disgust at Mary's novelizing a film (he feels it is beneath her), the phone

by her desk rings. She answers it. The next shot shows Yale, her previous lover, calling from a phone booth. He wants to see her. Mary abruptly dismisses him, but after she hangs up, her expression reveals his lingering in her thoughts. When Isaac asks who called, she lies.

Right away, the scene sets up the looming polarity of Mary and Isaac. He is casually stretched out on the bed writing with a pencil while she, contrastingly, sits up straight at a desk, typing with a vengeance and smoking a cigarette like it's to be her last.

The positioning of the camera in the hallway allows wall space to distance the couple. Cuts separate the shots so that the wall space fills two-thirds of the screen. He is placed in the left third of the screen, she in the right third. Isaac, the innocent, does not sense Mary's distant tension. He feels no isolation. Symbolically, Isaac's half of the hallway wall space contains an open door through which lies darkness. Mary's half of the hallway has no door. She appears more insular.

When the phone rings, the exterior shot places the phone booth on the far right-hand side, Mary's side, of the screen. Although he is outside across the street, his placement on the screen puts him, via cutting, closer to Mary than Isaac. Shortly, Mary leaves Isaac for Yale. The apartment scene, through not only telling dialogue, but symbolic mise-en-scene as well, foretells the break-up with thoughtful subtlety.

Allen would develop this budding visual flair in his next film, *STARDUST MEMORIES*, and the same approach can still be seen in films as late as *CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS*, but *MANHATTAN* revealed the parameters of his visual ambitions.

A more complex visual style, the expanding ensemble cast, and more deeply explored characters require what Allen evidently knew would not interfere: a linear narrative. Just as a seasoned musician knows that rests are as important as the notes, and the simplest melody can be as poignant as an intricate flourish, a good filmmaker knows when and how to slack the directorial reins to let the material breathe on its own. Whereas ANNIE HALL jumped, MANHATTAN flows. Other than Isaac's voice-over at the film's outset, there are no tricks--no flashbacks, split screens, camera-directed asides, or cartoon characters. Allen simply reverted back to a more classical method of telling a story.

The narrative differences between ANNIE HALL and MANHATTAN can best be illustrated by consulting Thomas Schatz's differentiation in "Modernist Strategies in New Hollywood:"<sup>54</sup>

### Classical

primacy of the tale  
(story as product)  
standardized technique  
straightforward  
director disguises presence  
(invisible narration)  
screen as transparent  
window  
"realism"  
passive, unselfconscious  
viewer  
(viewing as subjective act)  
(viewer engaged)  
(story tells itself)  
(viewer as consumer)  
(viewing as play)  
closed text

### Modernist

primacy of the telling  
(story as process)  
innovative technique  
ironic  
director acknowledges presence  
(self-reflexive narration)  
screen as opaque surface  
artifice, stylization  
active, self-conscious viewer  
(viewing as objective act)  
(viewer "distanced")  
(viewer constructs the story)  
(viewer as producer)  
(viewing as work)  
open text

(hermetic space)	(porous space; fiction-reality interface)
(three-act structure; closure)	(unstructured; open ended)
linear plot: causal logic	plotless; free association
motivated, consistent characters	inscrutable characters
(disclosure via exposition)	(information withheld)
primary conflict(s) obvious	conflicts ambiguous (or nonexistent)
conflict(s) resolved	conflict(s) unacknowledged or irreconcilable
(supports the status quo)	(questions the status quo)

"These oppositions represent conceptual limits: all films are to some degree both classical and modernist, thus falling somewhere between these two poles. However, there are texts which do approach one extreme or the other."<sup>55</sup>

Application of Schatz's model to the contrasting texts of ANNIE HALL and MANHATTAN reveal the following characteristics:

1. Primacy of the tale vs. primacy of the telling - The "telling" pervades through two of ANNIE HALL's three acts. The "tale" of MANHATTAN, with the exception of the introductory voice-over, is never ruptured narrationally.

2. Standardized vs. innovative technique - ANNIE HALL flashes backward temporally, incorporates split screens, animation, time-frame juxtapositions (an adult Alvy in his grade school classroom, for example), and camera-directed asides as narrative devices. MANHATTAN moves steadily forward in the traditional linear sense, employing conservative time-lapse editing, but nothing jarring or interruptive.

3. Straightforward vs. ironic - MANHATTAN calmly exposes and develops the interactions of an ensemble cast. ANNIE HALL chaotically and unpredictably follows the path of a doomed love affair.

4. Director disguises (vs. acknowledges) presence - Woody Allen portrays Isaac Davis, but remains a non-narrating character throughout MANHATTAN. Alvy Singer is a variation of the stand-up comic Woody Allen, who insists on self-reflexively "telling" the viewer, directly and through self-conscious narrative, about his bout with Annie.

5. Screen as transparent window vs. screen as opaque surface - Isaac only talks to other characters who never acknowledge the viewer's presence. Alvy often addresses the viewer.

6. "Realism" vs. artifice, stylization - MANHATTAN's characters and their situations are more believable. The issues dealt with have more depth and seriousness. ANNIE HALL's characters often communicate with each other through manipulation of the medium and its narrative capacities.

7. Passive, unselfconscious viewer vs. active, self-conscious viewer - Here, the polarity weakens. The viewer is "engaged" in a "subjective act" in both films - not "objective(ly)" "distanced" as is possible with a Modernist text. Despite ANNIE HALL's rambunctious narrative, it is never too difficult to piece the fragments together into a whole. The text is never indecipherable. The viewer remains as subjectively involved with plot and characters as with the same in MANHATTAN. While MANHATTAN "tells itself", though, ANNIE HALL *does* require the viewer to construct the story, but the "work" requires little effort.



8. Open vs. closed text - MANHATTAN exists in its own "hermetic" fictitious world, the screen acting as an impenetrable window through which the viewer watches the film, but never interacts. In ANNIE HALL, however, fiction and reality interface quite often through a much looser, "porous space." Camera-directed asides and voice-overs, for example, place the viewer in direct contact with the character(s).

Both films assume a three-act structure and both end with a *sense* of closure, though neither ending is of the traditional Hollywood type where the viewer generally knows how the story continues after the film has ended. Both ANNIE HALL and MANHATTAN "end" with the possibility of the story continuing in different directions.

9. Linear vs. no plot; causal logic vs. free association - MANHATTAN's narrative is absolutely linear while ANNIE HALL rampages through several temporal shifts and techniques. However, to link ANNIE HALL with "free association" would be inappropriate, for, while sequences are temporally juxtaposed, interpretation is not ambiguous.

10. Inscrutable vs. motivated, consistent characters - Both films are classical in that the characters are motivated and consistent. Neither film contains an inscrutable character about which information is held. Even though characters change or evolve, their transformations are causal and conceivable.

11. Primary, obvious vs. ambiguous (or nonexistent) conflict(s) - ANNIE HALL and MANHATTAN deal with conflicts arising from philosophical, moral, and ethical differences. The conflicts are always obvious. Any ambiguity lies in the viewer's own stance.

12. Conflict(s) resolved vs. unacknowledged or unresolved - Both films lean toward the Modernist text in that the conflicts are irreconcilable. ANNIE HALL questions the status quo with a failed love affair. Love did *not* conquer all. The end result is loneliness and resignation. MANHATTAN terminates the conflict with the same "boy loses girl" story, but Tracy's affirmation of "faith in people" lifts the film's ending to an almost optimistic resolution. Still, the effect is one of irreconciliation and loss.

Both films often defy categorical polarization. Essentially, though, ANNIE HALL is a more Modernist text and MANHATTAN is more classical.

After MANHATTAN, Allen explored many types of narrative, from period pieces (THE PURPLE ROSE OF CAIRO, A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S SEX COMEDY) to mock-documentary (ZELIG). When he returned to Manhattan-based contemporary romantic comedy, however, he tried his hand at the richest, most complex story-telling he's attempted to date.

The narrative of HANNAH AND HER SISTERS is, at once, a breaking of new ground and a compendious look back. The primary plot involves triangles - both romantic and familial. Hannah (Mia Farrow) is the eldest and most stable of three sisters. One sister, the floundering Holly (Dianne Wiest), ultimately marries Hannah's ex-husband, Mickey (Allen) after she battles with her friend April (Carrie Fisher) over an architect (Sam Waterston). The third sister, Lee (Barbara Hershey), guiltily engages in a torrid affair with Hannah's *present* husband, Elliot

(Michael Caine) while living with a solipsistically superior artist (Max Von Sydow). Additionally, Hannah must often mediate her melancholic parents' feuds.

The secondary plot concerns Allen's character, Mickey, the familiar hypochondriac. Drowned in ontological angst, he finally discovers happiness, not in brain-scans for non-existent brain tumors nor Krishnaism nor Aristotle, but in love.

Soap opera-ish though they may sound, the intertwining plot lines are handled with taste, finesse, and skill. HANNAH AND HER SISTERS marks the first time, for example, that Woody involves himself in an acting role in one of his own films as a non-central character. INTERIORS and THE PURPLE ROSE OF CAIRO excluded Allen as an actor altogether, but there was simply no place for him. The dramatic starkness of INTERIORS hardly allowed for a "Woody Allen" character and he would have proved extraneous in PURPLE ROSE. Allen's subordination of his character in HANNAH displays a certain confidence. No longer does he feel the need to centrally implant his celebrity to carry the material. Mickey's ordeal integrates trademark comic relief with the main story of Hannah's wrangling family. The juxtaposition, again, reflects trust, but curiously so, because, for all Allen's need to surge forward artistically, the integration of his comical, hypochondriacal character with the sophistication of a Tolstoy-influenced plot-web reveals an innovative combining of the old and new--the formative and mature.

Mickey Sachs is also part of the largest canvas of characters Allen has ever worked with. HANNAH involves nine major characters, all of

whom, as in *MANHATTAN*, affect one another, adding to, or chipping away at each other's mold.

The large central cast develops Allen's ensemble method with the tangling of fragile, volatile relationships: the adulterous infatuations, the weary marriages, the self-losing romances, and the desperate search for meaning.

*HANNAH*'s novelistic narrative dwells on the disjunction between people's thoughts and their actions, between what they say and what they mean. The film begins, for example, with one of thirteen titles: "God, she's beautiful" after which Elliot, the respectable financial advisor, is shown acting the proper party host while lustfully ogling his wife's sister. His voice-over reveals his innermost desires: "I just want to be alone with her and hold her and kiss her..."

Additionally, Holly and April vie for the attention of a handsome, available architect. As the two women tour the city with David, feigning eager absorption of his insight into the local architecture, Holly assumes the role of the glib sophisticate--an artificial persona. Later, she sits with David in his private opera box and weeps, generating what she feels is the required response to the event.

Hannah's parents, who entertain at the three Thanksgiving dinners by reminiscing about their show business days while Hannah's father (Lloyd Nolan) plays nostalgic melodies on the piano, present the picture of domestic tranquility. Their after-hours, heated argument, however, reveals deep resentment and distrust.

Hannah appears, to the others' annoyance, to be effortlessly in control of her life when, ultimately, she proves not to be so seamless.

Holly repeatedly claims to have found her niche while she pinballs through various vocations.

HANNAH AND HER SISTERS is a warm film--the most optimistic opus Allen has ever constructed, but until the uplifting denouement, the ensemble of characters role-play and wrestle with self-realization. Life is presented as one continuous, difficult search for the solutions to unanswerable questions. Elliot confides (in his analyst, of course) that "for all my education and so-called wisdom, I still can't fathom my own heart." His mistress, Lee, eventually leaves Frederick. After savoring the attention of another man, she makes a few self-discoveries. The man she once found fascinating and enlightening now only suffocates.

Ironically, Mickey, the character most hard-pressed for answers, yet the most honest and open with his feelings, is the most rewarded. The film concludes with Mickey extolling, to Holly, his amazement at the ironic blossoming of their relationship. "The heart," he claims, "is a very, very resilient little muscle." These are strange words coming from a man who, earlier, saw little reason for living and nearly put himself out of his misery for good.

Just as the Easter dinner served as a pivotal point in ANNIE HALL's narrative, the Thanksgiving feast becomes a temporal framing device in HANNAH. Three gatherings at Hannah's home, at the beginning, middle, and end of the picture, provide a two-year perspective. The first party introduces the characters and begins their interactive development. The subsequent dinners catch the viewer up on developments over the past year and how they affect and relate the main characters.

The first Thanksgiving gathering quietly establishes the tone and pace, pleasantly revealing the contrasting personalities of the three sisters and gently tangling the emerging plot lines. Elliot silently swoons over his wife's sister while Hannah's parents entertainingly float down memory lane at the piano. Talk is overheard of Lee's moody, introverted artist-cohabitant, and Hannah's hypochondriacal ex-husband is mentioned with laughter. The stage is set.

By the second holiday gathering, the plot lines have thickened considerably. Turmoil lurks beneath the festivities. Lee, much to Elliot's dismay, ends their guilt-ridden affair while Hannah expresses hostility toward Holly for exposing private matters through her writing. The parents, after having feuded nastily, serve as the only anchoring pleasantness with their usual reminiscing.

Another year quickly passes and the film ends with Hannah once again providing the spread. Now, the party serves as an unusually warm (by Allen standards) denouement. Elliot has a renewed relationship with Hannah and Lee has found contentment in another man. As the camera waltzes unobtrusively around the party over the gently wafting piano music, Holly, whose writing has everyone's praise, tells her new, once thought to be sterile husband, Mickey, she's pregnant. They embrace as the screen fades to black.

Thanksgiving may be the cruelest season because we ask so much of it and grow bitter when it cannot fulfill our dreams. Woody Allen asks us to look around the table once more. Love, like life itself is rarely perfect, rarely the stuff of dreams. Often it insists on our settling for damaged goods, or at

Thanksgiving dinner, savoring lumpy mashed potatoes and cold gravy--and being grateful.

-Richard A. Blake<sup>56</sup>

The resolute, positive ending of HANNAH AND HER SISTERS truly stands out. As Graham McCann observed:

After the succession of disappointments his characters have suffered - the break-up of Alvy's affair, the uncertainty of Isaac's relationship, the bitter failures of Danny Rose - this moment of affirmation, of celebration, we accept after many years spent in the company of these images.<sup>57</sup>

Allen didn't like the ending. Eric Lax, in his recent biography of the filmmaker, wrote:

What disappointed him was his ability to successfully write the ending he wanted. Ideally, Hannah's husband would still be infatuated with her sister, who is now in love with someone else, but he was unable to make it work on film...It was too neat and tidy a finish for him. Life is more ambiguous, more unpleasant than that, and life is what he wants to accurately portray.<sup>58</sup>

Allen has always been overly critical of his work, but perhaps his distaste for HANNAH's ending is a bit shortsighted. The film is certainly one of his smoothest. The narrative flows like no Allen film before it. The score, rich with Cole Porter and Rodgers & Hart, Puccini and Bach, coupled with cinematographic elegance and well-directed performances by a sterling cast give HANNAH AND HER SISTERS a certain glow that might suffer betrayal by a less than pleasant ending. Rather than pull

the rug out from underneath the viewer's feet, as Allen obviously felt inclined to do, one is left to luxuriate barefoot in the lush pile of the most optimistic denouement the filmmaker has ever produced.

Uncharacteristic though it may be, the ending does not cheapen the rest of the narrative; to the contrary, it enriches by following through.

Also enriching is the work of Carlo DiPalma. Gordon Willis, Allen's cinematographer for the eight films previous to HANNAH, was unavailable when the film went into production. DiPalma, who had gained prominence with Michelangelo Antonioni's RED DESERT and BLOW-UP, was called in for what has proven to be a lasting collaboration. HANNAH, like MANHATTAN, photographically romanticizes New York, but through a less flamboyant eye. HANNAH is softer, like the narrative itself. Less studied mood lighting gives the film a warmth not found in Allen's earlier films.

Even sweeter to the eye than the softness of the hues is the camera movement. DiPalma's camera stays in constant motion, examining the three sisters' relationship as it quietly orbits their lunch table; spying on Lee and Elliot as it paces back and forth between the ends of bookstore shelves; uninterruptedly tracking Holly and Mickey through the record store from behind album titles. The camera floats with graceful restlessness, enhancing, and making less conspicuous, Allen's master shots.

Allen's having to use a different photographer inadvertently resulted in a type of maturation. Woody enjoyed Gordon Willis's work. He employed his talents for every picture after ANNIE HALL. With DiPalma, however, Allen fully realized how to incorporate a



cinematographer's individualized approach into the narrative. He later employed the singular talent of Sven Nykvist, most often connected with his work with Ingmar Bergman, for *ANOTHER WOMAN* (1988), *CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS* (1989), and the *OEDIPUS WRECKS* portion of *NEW YORK STORIES* (1989). DiPalma photographed *ALICE* (1990). Allen has become very aware of the differences in photographic approach among the three cinematographers:

Gordon's is a very American style. It's wonderful. He would have been sensational working with John Ford or someone like that. His shots are superbly lit, I mean like Rembrandt. He just loves to paint with light. Carlo, on the other hand, likes the camera constantly in motion and is between the two of them. Sven likes to be in motion but he is not as committed to it as Carlo is. Carlo is a very beautiful mood lighter.<sup>59</sup>

*HANNAH AND HER SISTERS* hasn't the hip, "in contrast with L.A." setting of *ANNIE HALL* or the rhapsodic travelogue look of *MANHATTAN*. The comfortable interiors of the West Side apartments, the posh restaurants and shops, and the clean, architecturally aesthetic streets of upper-crust Manhattan give the film the familiar "Allen's New York" feel, but with a more relaxed elegance. Until necessary, the Big Apple hovers in the background, providing an almost opulent environment--one in which Allen evidently feels at home.

Douglas Brode nicely summed up *HANNAH*'s place in Allen's *oeuvre*:

Allen at last passes from romanticism to realism. With that philosophic and aesthetic metamorphosis, he has

transformed from an artist of great potential into a mature filmmaker. Having experimented with entertaining comedy in his early work, then stumbled awkwardly but steadily toward a more serious vision, he is at last an auteur who has completed the first film of the third and most important phase of his career.<sup>60</sup>

What ANNIE HALL revealed the potential for, and MANHATTAN promised, HANNAH AND HER SISTERS delivers. The richness and diversity of characters, the visual elegance, and the finely woven narrative provide a landmark in Allen's filmmaking career.

## CHAPTER IV

### ROMANCE

ANNIE HALL's timely portrayal of an ill-fated romantic relationship probed a mid-seventies nerve. Women were exploring independence and men were discovering new brands of masculinity. Whereas the traditional mating game dictated clear-cut boundaries and specific sex roles, the new courtship rites contained fewer, but more complex rules. Feminism and the resulting male bewilderment significantly altered the method of the dating ritual, the effects of which are still being realized today.

In 1972, Carol Tavris, senior editor of Psychology Today, prepared a questionnaire asking readers to share their attitudes and experiences on the roles of men and women in our society. Some responses indicated a following of tradition: "My needs must be moderated by our children and my husband who is at a very stressful point in his career. I will not demand my freedom at his cost"- Female.<sup>61</sup> Most responses, however, revealed a new perspective:

My mother never had a job outside her home. But she worked very hard, too hard. She took her wife-mother role too seriously, was never human, and seemed unhappy, although she professed to love us all very much. Unless I can get myself together, I see me very much the same... - Female.<sup>62</sup>

My wife felt I was holding her back and I am forced to admit that she has advanced in her field much more rapidly since the divorce. I loved my wife as a person and a spouse and did not want her to leave . However, I know that she must live her life to be happy. - Male.<sup>63</sup>

The female perspective dreads the traditional role of little more than subservience. The male perspective is mystified; understanding, but confused.

Five years later, around the time of ANNIE HALL's release, Psychology Today published reader's views on masculinity. The subtitle read: "According to 28,000 Psychology Today readers, the macho frontiersman is well on his way out as the model of the perfect American man. But he isn't gone yet, and men have more trouble defining the new male than women have." The caption is accompanied by a photograph of a naked man cowering from an onlooking, confidently smirking woman in a business suit.

Just prior to ANNIE HALL's release, Diane Keaton told The New York Times:

I think Woody's saying something about the fact that it is very difficult nowadays to have a romance, especially when you're single and ambitious, and have nothing to hold on to, like a family. Things have changed a lot since birth control and the women's movement...Relationships are very difficult, especially for someone like me, who's 31, ambitious and single, and lives in New York.<sup>64</sup>

When Allen places his trademark little man character in a contemporary context with ANNIE HALL, his female counterpart assumes a different stance. No longer the shallow, wacky cohort or the elusive bombshell, she stands toe to toe on even ground with her partner. As Ross Wetzsteon observed for Ms. magazine:

Until ANNIE HALL, when the Diane Keaton character was at least given a degree of autonomy, women in Woody Allen's movies were little more than projections of male lust--the only apparent contradiction that most men still cling to, that while women are so crucial to our satisfaction, at the same time we grant them no independent existence.<sup>65</sup>

The "apprenticeship", a microcosmic representation of the feminist movement plays an integral part in Allen's insight into interpersonal relationships, recurring thematically in ANNIE HALL, MANHATTAN, and HANNAH AND HER SISTERS. The male acts as an instructor of reality, as a source of wisdom who tries to mold and enlighten his lover. The imposition succeeds only to backfire, however, as the male, blindly assuming the female *needs* his guiding dominance, ultimately loses her to independence, an overlooked byproduct of his own creation.

The "apprenticeship" motif begins describing Annie and Alvy, for example, shortly after they've met, as Alvy tries to bluff his way through a conversation with Annie about photography (her hobby), pontificating pseudo-intellectually while she counters, however self-consciously, with intuitive, natural honesty:

- Annie: Aesthetic criteria? You mean, whether it's, uh, a good photo or not?
- Alvy: The-the medium enters in as a condition of the art form itself. That's--
- Annie: Well, well, I...to me--I...I mean, it's-it's-it's all instinctive, you know. I mean, I just try to uh, feel it, you know? I try to get a sense of it and not think about it so much.

Early in their relationship, as they browse through a bookstore, Alvy picks up Death and Western Thought and The Denial of Death and tells Annie, "I'm gonna buy you these books, I think, because you should read them. You know, instead of that cat book." Initially taken by Annie's naive charm, Alvy eventually instills his own insecurities in her. When Annie is introduced in the film, her mood has been fouled from missing her analyst appointment. The Annie Hall Alvy first met was gregarious and happily adjusted with analysis nowhere on her agenda. Alvy, the psychiatric veteran and self-appointed mentor, however, evidently has persuaded Annie to seek therapy. Ironically, it is Annie's analyst who introduces her, through dream interpretation, to Alvy's smothering influence. Likewise, after Alvy urges Annie to enroll in adult education courses "because you meet wonderful, interesting professors", his own advice betrays him. When he spies her arm in arm with one of her professors, he jealously and contradictorily declares: "Adult education is such junk! The professors are so phony".

Alvy's guidance betrays him again after extinguishing Annie's insecurities about singing. Allen initially shows her unsuccessfully performing in a noisy bar. The microphone feeds back, dishes crash, and the audience chatters obliviously. Afterward, Annie bemoans her performance, but Alvy touts her talent, refusing to let her give up. Later, in high contrast, a polished, confident Annie lulls a hushed audience. An unobtrusive medium close-up lingers admiringly through her entire song. Responding to warm applause, Annie blushes gracefully. After her revelatory performance, Tony Lacey (Paul Simon), a successful recording artist, approaches Annie to invite her and Alvy to meet "Jack and Angelica" for drinks. Looking on in a jealous panic, Alvy quickly tightens the leash, fabricating and reminding Annie of a "thing" they were to attend. She complies disappointedly. Through sheer coincidence, the couple later find themselves at Lacey's house in Los Angeles where Tony offers Annie a recording opportunity. On the plane back to New York, as Annie and Alvy appear bored and isolated from each other, Annie's voice-over reveals a festering restlessness: "That was fun. I don't think California is bad at all. It's a drag coming home...I have to face facts. I-I adore Alvy, but our relationship doesn't seem to work anymore."

Annie leaves Alvy to move in with Lacey in Los Angeles. Upon regretting their break-up, Alvy flies from New York to propose marriage to a cordial, but distant Annie. Happy and slimmer, she equates Alvy with neurotic repression. The couple eventually meet again after she has moved back to New York and "kick around old times", but only as friends.

In *ANNIE HALL*, Allen depicts the pressures contemporary society places on interpersonal relationships in an often funny, but realistically painful portrayal. The apprenticeship aspect of the relationship becomes a motivating, but inevitably destructive force as Allen's representation reflects the inability of the contemporary male to deal with an independent, free-thinking woman. An equally self-realized female partner threatens the male's dominating, teacher/father figure role.

In *MANHATTAN*, Allen develops the apprenticeship relationship with gutsier, more complex characterizations. Forty-two year old Isaac dates seventeen-year old Tracy. Joking guiltily about their age difference and encouraging her to pursue other interests and relationships, he still enjoys her attention, her sexuality, and, when it's too late, her genuineness.

Tracy's youth represents a deeper innocence than Annie's initial naivete. Lacking experience, she's the perfect clay for Isaac to mold. As *MANHATTAN* progresses, however, and the couple interact with each other more, Tracy's youthful brand of wisdom overshadows her innocence. Unlike Isaac, she seems instinctively aware of her needs in a relationship as she sees the age difference in an incidental, surmountable light. She fails to see Isaac so much as a teacher or father figure as much as she simply sees him for himself--a neurotic, but talented man who's fun to be with.

Isaac, on the other hand, sees their age difference as an insurmountable, often embarrassing obstacle. In his mind, he is every bit the teacher, and Tracy is the cute, unrealistic naif. He pushes her away, constantly dissuading her from becoming too serious about him.



When he does accept, and invariably enjoy, her company, however, he exposes her to the culture of *his* world: Renoir films, Veronica Lake, and Rita Hayworth.

Ultimately, Isaac, like Alvy with Annie, lets Tracy slip through his hands only to regret it and futilely ask her back. The final scene in *MANHATTAN* summarizes their relationship. After the woman Isaac left Tracy for has returned to her former lover, he realizes Tracy's worth and frantically runs across the city to make amends. He finds her with packed bags about to leave town. Much to Tracy's bewilderment, Isaac admits to having made a mistake, still loving her, and wanting her back. Though moved, Tracy assumes a revelatory adult stance:

Tracy:                   You really hurt me.

Isaac:                   Uh, it was not on purpose...it was just--just the way I was looking at things back then--

Tracy:                   (Interrupting) Well, I'll be back in six months.

Isaac:                   Six months--are you kidding? Six months you're gonna go for?

Tracy:                   We've gone this long. Well, I mean, what's six months if we still love each other?

Isaac:                   Hey, don't be so mature, okay? I mean,

six months is a long time. Six months. You know, you're gonna be...working in the theater there. You'll be with actors and directors. You know, you're...you know, you go to rehearsal and you-you hang out with those people. You have lunch a lot. And, and...well, you know, attachments form and-and, you know, I mean, you-you don't wanna get into that kind of...I mean, you'll-you'll change. You know, you'll be-you'll be...in six months you'll be a completely different person.

Tracy: (Chuckling) Well, don't you want me to have that experience? I mean, a while ago you made such a convincing case.

Isaac: Yeah, of course I do, but you know, but you could...you know, you-I mean, I-I just don't want that thing about you that I like to change.

Tracy: I've gotta make a plane.

Isaac: Oh, come on, you...come on. You don't-you don't have to go.

Tracy:                   Why couldn't you have brought this up last week? Look, six months isn't so long. Not everybody gets corrupted. Tsch. Look, you have to have a little faith in people.

Earlier, when Tracy mentioned traveling to London to study theater for six months, Isaac vehemently encouraged her to go:

Of course you should go. I mean, it's great. You'll have a great time in London. It's a great town and you're a wonderful actress. And it's a terrific place to study. You know, it's--uh, uh, you know, you'll be the toast of the town. You'll have a good time. Really, you shouldn't--you shouldn't pass that.

Isaac encourages the London trip with the same enthusiasm Alvy encouraged adult education and just as Alvy contradictorily denounced Annie's professor, Isaac ultimately pans Tracy's trip abroad.

Though MANHATTAN is a subtler film than ANNIE HALL, Isaac and Tracy are an exaggerated version of Alvy and Annie. The wider polarities emphasize the apprenticeship aspect of their relationship. The age difference, the increased character depth, the "other woman", and the wider range of issues (lesbianism, infidelity, parenthood) lends a complexity to Isaac's and Tracy's relationship not found in Alvy and Annie.

In a different light, HANNAH AND HER SISTERS bears the same relationship to MANHATTAN as MANHATTAN does to ANNIE HALL.



Lee: I can't take this anymore.

Frederick: I'm just trying to complete an education  
I started on you five years ago.

Lee: I'm not your pupil. I was, but I'm not.

Frederick: When you leave the nest, I just want you  
to be ready to face the real world.

Lee: Frederick, we're going to have to make  
some changes.

Frederick: Like what?

Lee: Oh, you know what. I'm suffocating.

(Later in the same conversation, after Frederick has discovered  
Lee's infidelity):

Frederick: You are, you are my only connection to  
the world!

Lee: Oh, God, that's too much responsibility  
for me. It's not fair! I want a less  
complicated life, Frederick. I want a  
husband, maybe even a child before it's  
too late.

Frederick: Jesus...Jesus!

Lee: ... what do you get out of me, anyway?  
I mean...it's not sexual anymore. It's  
certainly not intellectual. I mean,  
you're so superior to me in every way  
that-

Frederick: Please don't patronize me!

Like Isaac, Frederick is much older than his lover and his self-absorption blinds him to Lee's needs. Like Alvy, he suffocates his partner. His self-imposed role as teacher leaves little room for compromise or objectivity. Lee, like Annie, realizes her deprivation and strengths only after experiencing the affectionate attention of another man. Like Tracy, Lee has the prevailing ability to wind up on her feet. Just as Tracy wisely cut herself loose from Isaac at *MANHATTAN*'s conclusion, the final scene of *HANNAH AND HER SISTERS* reveals Lee relishing a new marriage. Again, the blindly selfish male half of the apprenticeship relationship deservedly loses out. Again, the female emerges with hard-earned, but liberating wisdom. Controlling, smothering men lose their women to a gradually, but inevitably, realized independent consciousness. The apprenticeship in *ANNIE HALL* portrayed a fresh feminist awareness, *MANHATTAN* broadened the same idea with more-dimensional characters and circumstances, and *HANNAH AND HER SISTERS* epitomized the relationship with Lee and Frederick.

When Lee declares the futility of their relationship to Frederick and says, "What do you get out of me, anyway? I mean...it's not sexual

anymore..." she echoes another recurring Woody Allen theme: sex as a problematic, yet integral part of a romantic relationship.

Woody Allen has always presented sexual issues frankly, perceptively, and very accessibly. As Wetzsteon pointed out,

Sometimes I feel like Woody Allen has a spy in my head. He understands me too well. So I can't laugh too hard, because the woman I'm with will suspect I'm thinking he's talking about us. And I can't not laugh at all, because then she'll *know* I am.<sup>66</sup>

Since Woody Allen's first film, TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN, when Virgil Starkwell, eagerly anticipating a first date, absent-mindedly leaves the house without his pants, the filmmaker has made fun of male romantic anxiety. Women make fumbling, nervous wrecks of men who are desperate to project confidence and poise. The Little Man continues to suffer defeat when sexual relations prove elusive. Even when a seductress in PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM confides in Allan Felix that she's a nymphomaniac and proclaims sex as virtually the only reason for living, as soon as he tries to kiss her, she recoils: "What kind of woman do you take me for?" As Felix leaves her apartment, he asks himself deprecatingly, "How did I misread those signs?"

In ANNIE HALL, the sexual problems shift from "scoring" to sexual incompatibility and sustaining interest through a long lasting relationship. In Alvy's case, Annie needs marijuana to enjoy sex and she soon loses interest altogether. His second ex-wife was too preoccupied with social climbing to be bothered with sex, and when she finally did commit, she became too easily distracted. At one point, Alvy

ends up in bed with a Rolling Stone reporter with whom sex becomes a test of endurance. Afterward, as he catches his breath, she apologizes for her requirements.

Interestingly, Alvy passes up sex with his first ex-wife to discuss the JFK assassination:

Allison:                    You're using this conspiracy theory as  
an excuse to avoid sex with me.

Alvy:                         Oh, my God! (Then to the camera) She's  
right! Why did I turn off Allison  
Portchnik? She was-she was beautiful.  
She was willing. She was  
real...intelligent.

Alvy's avoiding Allison reflects a reaction to sexual politics. Turning the tables, Allison shows aggression when she says, "I *need* your attention." What might have traditionally seemed like a fantasy-come-true, now disarms the conditioned-to-pursue male as he finds himself pursued.

Still, the male sexuality in ANNIE HALL projects a frustrated insatiability. The split-screen scene with Alvy in analysis on one side and Annie in analysis on the other illustrates an integral breakdown in their relationship.

Alvy's

psychiatrist:                How often do you sleep together?



Annie's

psychiatrist: Do you have sex often?

Alvy: Hardly ever. Maybe three times a week.

Annie: Constantly! I'd say three times a week. Like the other night, Alvy wanted to have sex.

Alvy: She would not sleep with me the other night, you know, it's -

Annie: And...I don't know...I mean, six months ago I-I woulda done it. I woulda done it just to please him.

Alvy: I mean...I tried everything, you know, I put on soft music and my-my red light bulb, and...

Annie: But the thing is - I mean, since our discussions here, I feel I have a right to my own feelings. I think you woulda been happy because...uh, uh, I really asserted myself.

Annie thinks for herself. As her sexual awareness increases, she becomes less hesitant to deny Alvy what she evidently perceives as an unsatisfying, perhaps bothersome, ritual. Annie no longer feels obligated to sleep with Alvy solely for *his* satisfaction.

In MANHATTAN, Allen chooses to elaborate on sexual relationships by centering Isaac in the middle of a variety of women, all of whom present different sexual images. Tracy projects fresh, curious

youth, Mary portrays the intellectual but unstable alternative, and Jill, the emasculating ex-wife, represents humiliation and a paranoid perception of feminism.

Tracy and Isaac enjoy sex often:

Isaac:                   ...I've got nothing but feelings for you, but, you know...you don't wanna get hung up with one person at your age. It's charming, you know, and (clearing his throat)...erotic. There's no question about that. As long as the cops don't burst in, we're - you know, I think we're gonna break a couple of records...

Later, in another bedroom scene, Isaac appears to be slipping into the "avoiding Allison" syndrome, but Tracy's adventurous curiosity and his own male ego bring him around:

Isaac:                   Do you hear that sound?

Tracy:                   Let's fool around. It'll take your mind off it.

Isaac:                   Hey, how many times a night can you...How often can you make love in an evening?

Tracy:                   A lot.

Isaac:                   Yeah, I can tell. A lot. That's...well, a lot is my favorite number. Gee, really, can you?

Tracy: Yeah, well, let's do it in some strange way that you've always wanted to do, but nobody would with you.

Isaac: I'm shocked. What kind of talk is that from a kid your age? I'll get...I'll get my scuba diving equipment..."

When Isaac ends their relationship, Tracy pleads with him: "We have laughs together. I care about you. Your concerns are my concerns. We have great sex."

Tracy represents escape--refreshing innocence. Her sexual perspective carries no political or psychological baggage. Uninhibited and confident, she finds sex fun and easy. In the midst of feminism and its entailing sexual politics, Tracy is an oasis--a reminder of how easy it is to disportion the simplest, most natural instincts. As Natalie Gittelson wrote:

MANHATTAN testifies with eloquence and candor that Allen may also have a soft spot in his heart for young, young women. But there is little of Humbert ("Lolita") Humbert here. Although sex is by no means devalued, the real attraction lies between kindred spirits. The older Allen grows, the more he seems to value innocence in women...that shiningness of soul that age so often tarnishes.<sup>67</sup>

Tracy also provides a welcome reprieve from the intellectual distortion of sex that Allen satirizes at an ERA benefit where Isaac mingles with Mary's friends:

- Dennis: I'm just about to direct a film...of my own script and, um...the premise is: This guy screws so great -
- Isaac: (interrupting) Screws so great?
- Dennis: - screws so great that when...he brings a woman to orgasm, she's so fulfilled...that she dies, right? Now, this one...(looking at Mary) excuse me, finds this hostile.
- Mary: (shaking her head) This one? Hostile...God, it's worse than hostile. It's aggressive-homicidal.
- Dennis: I beg your -
- Isaac: (interrupting, reacting) She dies?
- Mary: (to Isaac, laughing nervously): You-you have to forgive Dennis...he's Harvard direct to Beverly Hills...it's Theodor Reik with a touch of Charles Manson.
- Dennis: (nodding) Yeah, right.
- Polly: I...uh, I finally had an orgasm and my doctor told me it was the wrong kind.

(There is a slight pause while everyone digests Polly's words)

Isaac: (to Polly, breaking the pause): Did you have the wrong kind? Oh, really? I've never had the wrong kind...never. Uh, my worst one was right on the money.

Tracy's innocence also relieves the ego bruising by Isaac's ex-wife. Much to Isaac's humiliation, Jill writes, and has published, a book about the failure of her marriage to Isaac and the discovery of greater sex with another woman: "Making love to this deeper, more masterful female made me realize what an empty experience, what a bizarre charade sex with my husband was."

Isaac and Mary relate to each other sexually on a different level than Isaac and Tracy. Whereas Tracy simply wants to "fool around," for example, Mary feels "both attracted and repelled by the male organ." As much as Isaac enjoys Tracy's youthful sexual outlook, he connects with Mary's experience. Also a divorcee and a survivor of an "apprenticeship" ("I was tired of submerging my identity to a very brilliant, dominating man"), she empathizes with Isaac's romantic disappointments. As Isaac tells Mary about Jill leaving him for another woman, she responds, "That's incredible sexual humiliation. It's enough to turn you off of women...and I think it accounts for the little girl...Oh, sure, I understand, believe me. Sixteen years old and no possible threat at all."

Mary's sympathetic reaction to Jill's book attracts Isaac. Tracy only threatens Isaac because she makes him feel guilty, but Mary's coldly analyzing that relationship comfortingly confirms Isaac's reservations

about Tracy. Still, after Isaac's and Mary's first sexual interlude, Isaac playfully but egotistically assumes the analytical reins:

Yeah, you were dynamite. Except I did get the feeling that, for about two seconds in there, you were faking a little bit. Not a lot. You were just overacting...when you dug your nails into my neck.

Isaac's hypercriticism allows him the rebuilding of his sexual ego. Just as he bragged, only half-jokingly, to Tracy about his "astonishing sexual technique", Isaac hides, and desperately struggles to heal the wounded masculine pride his ex-wife publicly injured. Personifying the fragile contemporary male ego, he imagines himself as the picture of virility, yet his braggadocio is, in fact, a defense mechanism. To Isaac, sexual machismo represents the masculinity that helps simplify the traditional roles and values which blur in front of his bewildered eyes. He is, after all, a romantic who fears the reduction of love-making to a function. He needs the spontaneity and the passion. Sex is serious business--very private, very special. "I think people should mate for life", he says, "like pigeons or catholics."

Mating for life and the idea of marriage takes on futile proportions, however, reflecting the confusion, tension, and often ambivalence, which stems from the questioning of morality and established rituals.

Allen's characters bemoan the brevity of their relationships, but the institution of marriage resonates negativity. When Annie wants to move in with Alvy, he panics, "Jesus, you don't want it to be like we're married, do yuh?" Trying to convince her to keep her own apartment, he rationalizes, "Because you know it's there, we don't have to go to it, we

don't have to deal with it, but it's like a free-floating life raft...that we know we're not married." When Mary mentions to Isaac, a bitter divorcee, that she could imagine having children with him, he only sees that as a signal for sex. Allen also portrays Yale's and Emily's marriage as having little sanctity. Yale has an affair with Mary, the discretion of which entails lying to Emily.

Isaac:                   But you haven't said anything to Emily?

Yale:                    No, God, No.

Isaac:                   It's amazing. I'm stunned because I--of all the people I know, I always...thought for sure that you and Emily had one of the best marriages.

Yale:                    We *do*. You know, I mean, I love her.

Isaac:                   Yeah, but you're seeing, but you--

Yale:                    I--I know it. I know, but I just--I mean, in all the years that we've been married, I've--you know what, I've had, what, one or two very minor...things with other women. I mean--I mean, very...listen...I hate the whole idea of it. I hate myself when I'm doing this sort of thing.

The characters are not without guilt, but show little compunction for continuing the infidelities. The traditional premise of long-term, monogamous commitment is either ignored or taken for granted.

ANNIE HALL and MANHATTAN both portray marriage as a futile endeavor, a producer of slow-healing scars, but HANNAH AND HER SISTERS produced nearly a decade later, reflects a more mature, less self-important view of marriage and romantic relationships. The film is the work of an older, wiser author. Although Allen's life should not be confused with his characters', in 1987, when asked by Rolling Stone, if he felt more contented personally, he replied: "Well, for the last seven years I've been seeing Mia, and things have been stable. And I've been introduced, through her, to a lot of children and all the activities with them...it's a pleasurable dimension."<sup>68</sup> Long-term commitments require patience and compromise; an elusive realization for characters in ANNIE HALL and MANHATTAN. Those two films portray a more narcissistic culture; people having too many inner problems to relate to each other, let alone for any length of time. HANNAH AND HER SISTERS's larger cast contains plenty of self-absorbed characters, but the film's larger message conveys working out problems and rolling with the punches.

HANNAH AND HER SISTERS is not, however, without its share of relationships that fail to endure. Lee leaves Frederick, but their relationship was based on "apprenticeship", not mutual respect. Hannah's marriage to Mickey failed because, we are led to believe, of Mickey's infertility, but the couple remain good friends. Unlike Isaac or Alvy, Mickey refuses to reflect on his marriage with rancor. After



spending time with Hannah on her children's birthday, he resignedly, but realistically consoles himself: "Gee, Hannah's sweet. Although, sometimes I still do get angry when I think of things. Oh, what the hell. At least I'm not paying child support."

Graham McCann writes:

In ANNIE HALL, Alvy Singer was searching for the perfect love, the love that continues to excite, the love that will never fade. The remarkable feature of HANNAH AND HER SISTERS is Mickey's eventual recognition that, although loves fade, other loves are born.<sup>69</sup>

In the final scene of HANNAH AND HER SISTERS, Mickey tells Holly, his new wife:

You know, I was talking with your father before...and I was telling him that it's ironic. I always used to have Thanksgiving with Hannah...and I never thought I could love anybody else. And here it is, years later and I'm married to you and completely in love with you. The heart is a very, very resilient little muscle. It really is.

Hannah's parents epitomize that resiliency. Show business veterans whose ships never quite arrived, theirs is a world of reminiscence. During the aftermath of one of their recurring, bitter arguments, Hannah's voice-over explains:

She was so beautiful at one time, and he was so dashing. Both of them just full of promise and hopes that never materialized. (The camera leaves Hannah's face as she continues to reflect; it moves to the den, to the row of family photos on the piano:

one of a present-day Evan and Norma, others where both Norma and Evan are young, beautiful, hopeful. The music plays on.) And the fights and the constant infidelities to prove themselves...and blaming each other...

Norma drinks, hurls resentful insults at Evan, who bitterly retaliates. Stormy though their marriage appears, however, it endures the turbulence. Allen, employing the Thanksgiving dinners as a recurring temporal reference, elegantly inserts Evan and Norma's peaceful acceptance of each other into the festivities as a reminder of the cost of a true romantic relationship. The last of the three dinners shows Evan and Norma, again at the piano, blissfully strolling down memory lane with Evan's thoughtful, lilting piano guiding the way as Norma mouths the lyrics, "Isn't it romantic?" The couple represent a romanticism not found in ANNIE HALL or MANHATTAN. As volatile as their relationship appears, their marriage has lasted. They have learned to live with each other's faults, to hold fast to commitment. As the best days of their lives are in the past, remembrance is a foundation for their bond, but they are still together and as strong-willed as they are as individuals, they have refused to give up on each other.

Hannah and Elliot represent a contemporary version of the lasting romantic relationship. Hannah's self-sufficiency estranges Elliot so he looks elsewhere to be needed and thinks he has found solace in an affair with Hannah's younger sister Lee. The affair fails to endure more than passionate afternoons in hotel rooms, however. During the last Thanksgiving dinner, the film's coda, the camera arcs approvingly

around a beaming Lee as she converses with her new husband. Elliot's voice-over looks back on their affair:

Oh, Lee, you are something. You look very beautiful. Marriage agrees with you. Everything that has happened between us seems more and more hazy. I acted like such a fool. I don't know what came over me. The complete conviction that I couldn't live without you. What did I put us both through? And Hannah...who as you once said, I love much more than I realized.

Hannah remains oblivious to her husband's infidelity, but their marriage rebounds, after a volatile yet imperative airing of festered grievances, back onto solid ground. **HANNAH AND HER SISTERS** leaves us with the picture of hope.

In terms of romantic relationships, **ANNIE HALL** is a reactionary film. In the wake of the sexual revolution and the feminist movement, the film responds to change by portraying "apprenticeship" and the difficulty of sustaining an interpersonal relationship in the face of equality and newly established prescriptions for feminism and masculinity. **MANHATTAN** proves more interpretive, translating mid-seventies shock into late-seventies adjustment. **HANNAH AND HER SISTERS**, produced nearly a decade later, portrays stalwart ramifications (apprenticeship, broken marriage), but reveals a hopeful positiveness--a realization of the value of compromise and selflessness. The breadth of the three films ranges from futility through introspection to cooperation.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Though ANNIE HALL seems a millennium behind him, Woody Allen's milestone film serves easily as a starting point in charting the filmmaker's maturation. The film continued to develop the trademark love, sex, and death themes, but the timely setting and the unique treatment of subject matter afforded Allen a discerning voice--a vision he had developed to a degree, but which welcomed multi-directional expansion. That expansion revealed itself comparably in MANHATTAN and HANNAH AND HER SISTERS. Taken as a series of landmarks, these films show a marked progression toward a more mature understanding and treatment of comedy and romantic relationships, as well as maturation as a craftsman and storyteller.

Initially, Allen relied on his comedic talents to find his voice as a filmmaker. As his *oeuvre* increased, however, so did Allen's confidence. After ANNIE HALL, he produced INTERIORS, a dark, dramatic Bergmanesque character study disappointing critics and public alike who relished Allen's comedic flair. But straying from comedy only proved temporary as Allen, the following year, released one of his most important films. Combining the exploration of contemporary urban mores with subtler humor, MANHATTAN revealed a more sophisticated comic whose foray into drama had proven beneficial. Allen realized, by completely breaking away from sight gags and one-liners in

INTERIORS, a more complex narrative and thematic grammar--a more personalized melding of comedic expression with dramatic portrayal.

HANNAH AND HER SISTERS, seven years and five films after MANHATTAN, continued the refining of Allen's comedic approach by interspersing a portrayal of his familiar "little man" character throughout an intricate web of dramatic romantic and familial tribulations.

HANNAH AND HER SISTERS also exemplified Allen's narrative maturation through its multiple interweaving plot lines, a significantly larger cast, and the use of a temporal framing device (the Thanksgiving holiday). ANNIE HALL had broken new narrative ground for Allen, not only by perceptively portraying timely subject matter, but by uniquely incorporating a self-reflexive modernist text into a traditional three-act structure. MANHATTAN continued narrative maturation with a calmer, more linear text. Showing more confidence in his writing and filmmaking abilities, Allen let the characterizations and mise-en-scene develop without the interference of super-impositions, split screens, or asides to the camera.

MANHATTAN advanced Allen's visual sense as well. With the aid of cinematographer Gordon Willis, Allen used lighting and composition to convey more meaning. The increasing number of master shots and the introductory / concluding cityscape montages also revealed a visual perspective not found in ANNIE HALL or other previous Woody Allen films. HANNAH AND HER SISTERS evidenced a development in visual style largely through the lens of Carlo DiPalma. On his first outing with Allen, DiPalma enhanced the more sophisticated narrative with

subdued, warmer lighting and coordinated elegant camera movement with smooth, well-choreographed blocking. Narratively, ANNIE HALL burst with experimentation, MANHATTAN augmented a stronger visual sense with less intrusive, more cinematically traditional storytelling, and HANNAH AND HER SISTERS painted a composite portrait of familiar Allen characters, situations, and relationships on a larger, more complex canvas.

The intricacies of interpersonal relationships have formed the heart of practically every Woody Allen film. Annie and Alvy's relationship in ANNIE HALL in particular spoke perceptively to a generation embroiled in issues of feminism and sexual awareness. MANHATTAN gracefully expanded on the same timely premise with broader characters and romantic relationships of greater complexity.

One of HANNAH AND HER SISTERS's several romances focused on the "apprenticeship", an integral relational aspect suggested in ANNIE HALL and developed in MANHATTAN. Alvy urged Annie, for example, to forego cat books and indulge one of his many obsessions by reading "The Denial of Death" and "Death and Western Thought". Similarly, Isaac Davis (in MANHATTAN) pompously insisted that his much younger lover Tracy knew nothing about love and felt compelled to constantly tutor her on too many other aspects of life. Both relationships disintegrated for various reasons, the strains of this "apprenticeship" obviously among them. On the other hand, Frederick's and Lee's relationship in HANNAH AND HER SISTERS exploded *explicitly* because "apprenticeship" was the sole, shallow reason for their being

together. Allen focused on romantic tribulations in HANNAH by clarifying the pitfalls and shortcomings of the relationships.

Romantic relationships lend easily to relating the rollercoaster ride of being a human being--the fun of falling in love, the laughable insecurities, and the drama of heartbreak. Woody Allen has learned to juggle and balance those nuances and mold his pertinent perceptions into trademark film situations and characterizations. Obstinate following his own path, Allen has practically ignored critical and public reaction to his work, letting his often eccentric conscience serve as his only guide. That doggedness has not prevented his path from forking, but as varied as Allen's work is (screwball comedy, stark drama, pseudo-documentary, period pieces, Fellini-ish fantasy, and contemporary comedy-dramas), certain consistencies remain. The love, sex, and death themes prevail, threading with varying emphases through all of Allen's films. Much as development necessitates change, Allen has evidently found it imperative to cling to a thematic nucleus and branch off into different genres from that center. This is not, however, to refute Allen's maturation as a filmmaker. Despite thematic redundancies, his films continue to evidence a steady development stemming from discovering the poignancy of subtlety, from learning method, technique, and style, and from the increasing ability to personalize vision, purpose and direction. It has been this project's purpose to analyze and elaborate on that maturation process by applying three criteria (comedy, narrative, and romance) to ANNIE HALL, MANHATTAN, and HANNAH AND HER SISTERS, three films that share the concerns of contemporary romantic comedies set in Manhattan.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Eric Lax, Woody Allen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991) 11.
- <sup>2</sup>Lax 65.
- <sup>3</sup>Lax 76.
- <sup>4</sup>William E. Geist, "The Rolling Stone Interview: Woody Allen," Rolling Stone 9 April 1987: 51.
- <sup>5</sup>Lax 11.
- <sup>6</sup>Saul Bellow, Interview with George Plimpton (ed.) Writers at Work (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) 192.
- <sup>7</sup>Graham McCann, Woody Allen: New Yorker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990) 89.
- <sup>8</sup>Walter Blair, Horse Sense in American Humor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942) 283, 300.
- <sup>9</sup>Nancy Pogel, Woody Allen (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987) 3.
- <sup>10</sup>Robert Benayoun, The Films of Woody Allen (New York: Harmony Books, 1985) 158.
- <sup>11</sup>McCann 19.
- <sup>12</sup>Benayoun 158.
- <sup>13</sup>McCann 53.
- <sup>14</sup>McCann 52.
- <sup>15</sup>Frank Rich, "Woody Allen Wipes the Smile Off His Face," Esquire May 1977: 75.
- <sup>16</sup>Rich 75.



- <sup>17</sup>Eric Lax, On Being Funny: Woody Allen & Comedy (New York: Manor Books, Inc., 1975) 224.
- <sup>18</sup>Lax 225.
- <sup>19</sup>Lax 225.
- <sup>20</sup>Lax 225.
- <sup>21</sup>Pogel 87.
- <sup>22</sup>Pogel 82.
- <sup>23</sup>Diane Jacobs, The Magic of Woody Allen (London: Robson Books, 1982) 117-118.
- <sup>24</sup>Jacobs 127.
- <sup>25</sup>McCann 162.
- <sup>26</sup>McCann 161.
- <sup>27</sup>Douglas Brode, Woody Allen: His Films and Career (New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1985) 191.
- <sup>28</sup>Brode 191.
- <sup>29</sup>Vivian Gornick, "Face it, Woody Allen, You're Not a Schlep Anymore," The Village Voice January 5, 1976.
- <sup>30</sup>Lester D. Friedman, Hollywood's Image of the Jew (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1982) 277.
- <sup>31</sup>Friedman 278.
- <sup>32</sup>Tom Shales, "Woody: the First Fifty Years," Esquire April, 1987: 90.
- <sup>33</sup>Roger Ebert, A Kiss is Still a Kiss (Kansas City: Andrews, McNeel & Parker, 1984) 228.
- <sup>34</sup>McCann 235.

<sup>35</sup>Thomas Schatz, Old Hollywood / New Hollywood: Ritual, Art, and Industry (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983) 225.

<sup>36</sup>Schatz 228.

<sup>37</sup>Schatz 180.

<sup>38</sup>Schatz 230.

<sup>39</sup>Maurice Yacowar, "Coherence in the Woody Allen Comedies," Wide Angle Vol.3, No.2: 38.

<sup>40</sup>Yacowar 38, 39.

<sup>41</sup>Ralph and Karen Rosenblum, When the Shooting Stops... The Cutting Begins (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979) 275.

<sup>42</sup>Rosenblum 275.

<sup>43</sup>Rosenblum 289, 290.

<sup>44</sup>Rosenblum 274.

<sup>45</sup>Brode 188.

<sup>46</sup>Lax 20.

<sup>47</sup>McCann 31.

<sup>48</sup>Brode 188.

<sup>49</sup>Eric Lax, Woody Allen: A Biography (New York: Alfred A. Kopf, Inc., 1991) 328.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Richard Schickel, "Woody Allen Comes of Age," Time 30 April 1979: 64.

<sup>52</sup>Lax 326.

<sup>53</sup>Lax 327.

<sup>54</sup>Schatz 232.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Richard A. Blake, "Woody and His Women," America 19 April 1986: 326.

<sup>57</sup>McCann 242-243.

<sup>58</sup>Lax 277.

<sup>59</sup>Lax 329.

<sup>60</sup>Brode 262, 263.

<sup>61</sup>Carol Tavris, "Woman & Man", Psychology Today March 1972: 57.

<sup>62</sup>Tavris 58.

<sup>63</sup>Tavris 64.

<sup>64</sup>Judy Klemesrud, "Diane Keaton: From Mr. Allen to Mr. 'Mr. Goodbar'", The New York Times Encyclopedia of Film 17 April 1977.

<sup>65</sup>Ross Wetzsteon, "Woody Allen: Schlemiel as Sex Maniac," Ms. November 1977: 15.

<sup>66</sup>Wetzsteon 14.

<sup>67</sup>Natalie Gittelson, "The Maturing of Woody Allen," The New York Times Magazine 22 April 1979: 30+

<sup>68</sup>Geist 42.

<sup>69</sup>McCann 238.

## APPENDIX

ANNIE HALL  
A United Artists Release (1977)

Cast

Woody Allen (Alvy Singer)  
Diane Keaton (Annie Hall)  
Tony Roberts (Rob)  
Carol Kane (Allison)  
Paul Simon (Tony Lacy)  
Shelley Duvall (Pam)  
Janet Margolin (Robin)  
Colleen Dewhurst (Mom Hall)  
Christopher Walken (Duane Hall)  
Donald Symington (Dad Hall)  
Helen Ludlam (Grammy Hall)  
Mordecai Lawner (Alvy's Dad)  
Joan Newman (Alvy's Mom)  
Jonathan Munk (Alvy, age 9)  
Ruth Volner (Alvy's Aunt)  
Martin Rosenblatt (Alvy's Uncle)  
Hy Ansel (Joey Nichols)  
Rashel Novikoff (Aunt Tessie)  
Russell Horton (Man in theatre line)  
Marshall McLuhan (himself)  
John Doumanian (Coke fiend)  
Bob Maroff and Rick Petrucelli (men outside theatre)  
Dick Cavett (himself)  
Johnny Haymer (comic)  
Lauri Bird (Tony Lacy's girlfriend)  
Jeff Goldblum (Party guest)  
Humphrey Davis, Veronica Radburn (Analysts)  
Shelly Hack (Pretty Girl on Street)  
Beverly D'Angelo (Star of Rob's TV Show)  
Sigourney Weaver (Alvy's date at end)  
Walter Bernstein (Annie's date at end)

Credits

Producer: Charles H. Joffe  
Associate Producer: Fred T. Gallo  
Executive Producer: Robert Greenhut  
Director: Woody Allen  
Script: Woody Allen and Marshall Brickman  
Photography: Gordon Willis  
Editing: Ralph Rosenblum  
Art Director: Mel Bourne

Animated Sequence: Chris Ishii  
Costume Design: Ruth Morley  
Casting: Juliet Taylor  
Panavision DeLuxe  
93 minutes  
Rating: PG

## MANHATTAN

A United Artists Release (1979)

### Cast

Woody Allen (Isaac Davis)  
Diane Keaton (Mary)  
Michael Murphy (Yale)  
Mariel Hemingway (Tracy)  
Meryl Streep (Jill)  
Anne Byrne (Emily)  
Karen Ludwig (Connie)  
Michael O'Donoghue (Dennis)  
Victor Truro, Tisa Farrow, Helen Hanft (Party Guests)  
Bella Abzug (Guest of Honor)  
Gary Weiss (TV Director)  
Karen Allen (TV Actress)  
Damion Sheller (Ike's son)  
Wallace Shawn (Jeremiah)  
Mark Linn Baker (Shakespearean Actor)  
John Domanian (Porsche owner)  
"Waffles" trained by Dawn Animal Agency.

### Credits

Producer: Charles H. Joffe  
Executive Producer: Robert Greenhut  
Writers: Woody Allen and Marshall Brickman  
Director: Woody Allen  
Photography: Gordon Willis  
Production Design: Mel Bourne  
Costume Design: Albert Wolsky  
Editor: Susan E. Morse  
Music by George Gershwin, adapted and arranged by Tom Pierson,  
performed by the New York Philharmonic and Buffalo Philharmonic  
Orchestras  
Casting: Juliet Taylor

Mr. Allen's wardrobe: Ralph Lauren  
96 minutes  
Rating: R

HANNAH AND HER SISTERS  
An Orion Pictures Release (1986)

Cast

Woody Allen (Mickey Sachs)  
Michael Caine (Elliot)  
Mia Farrow (Hannah)  
Carrie Fisher (April)  
Barbara Hershey (Lee)  
Lloyd Nolan (Hannah's Father)  
Maureen O'Sullivan (Hannah's Mother)  
Daniel Stern (Dusty)  
Max Von Sydow (Frederick)  
Dianne Wiest (Holly)  
Sam Waterston (The Architect)  
Tony Roberts (Mickey's Friend)  
Helen Miller, Leo Postrel (Mickey's Parents)  
Bobby Short (himself)  
John Doumanian (Thanksgiving Guest)

Credits

Producer: Robert Greenhut  
Executive Producers: Jack Rollins and Charles H. Joffe  
Associate Producer: Gail Sicilia  
Director: Woody Allen  
Screenplay: Woody Allen  
Director of Photography: Carlo DiPalma  
Film Editor: Susan E. Morse  
Production Designer: Jeffrey Kurland  
Color by Technicolor  
115 minutes  
Rating: PG-13

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