

WOODY ALLEN
ENGLISH 42 B-142B

Robert M. Polhemus

Spring, 2003

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Office Hours: Monday, 3:15-4:45, Thurs. 1:30-3:15 and by
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Course Time: M, W, 1:15-3:05, section to be announced

Course Location: History 202

Website

<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/english/courses/sites/polhemus/>

SYLLABUS

The central concern of this course is to view, study, thank about, and discuss representative films of Woody Allen, one of the most influential, prolific, controversial and significant filmmakers of the second half of the twentieth century and one of the major figures in twentieth-century comedy. We will stress his comic vision, his attitudes towards sex and gender relations in his films, his cultural importance, and the development of his career and work. We will view and discuss approx. one film a week (11 or 12). Each student will be asked weekly to give responses and submit questions on the films. There will be two or three short papers and a take-home final at the end of the quarter.

FILMS THE CLASS WILL VIEW:

Love and Death

Annie Hall

Manhattan

Stardust Memories

Zelig

Broadway Danny Rose

The Purple Rose of Cairo

Hannah and her Sisters

Crimes and Misdemeanors

Husbands and Wives

Deconstructing Harry

(optional and recommended, Everyone Says I Love You, Bullets Over Broadway, Sweet and Lowdown, Radio Days.)

Movies (Viewing Dates)

April 2	Introduction and Organization, various film clips
April 7	<u>Love and Death</u>
April 9	<u>Annie Hall</u>
April 14	<u>Manhattan</u>
April 21	<u>Stardust Memories</u>
April 28	<u>Zelig</u>
May 5	<u>Broadway Danny Rose</u>
May 7	<u>Hannah and Her Sisters</u>
May 12	<u>The Purple Rose of Cairo</u>
May 19	<u>Crimes and Misdemeanors</u>
May 28	<u>Husbands and Wives</u>
June 2	<u>Deconstructing Harry</u>

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:

A take-home final or paper. Students will also be asked to write out a questions and/or a brief comment or observation about the Woody Allen film for the week. There will be two or three short papers (500-750 words) on assigned topics. You might write on movies not assigned--that might be possible with instructor approval.

CLASS TOPICS (the topics for you to think about and take seriously will have direct or indirect links to the viewing for the week):

April 2: Introduction and Organization

April 7: Early Allen films: are they dated? do they hold up? is Love and Death still funny and relevant? what makes lasting, funny comedy? political significance of Love and Death? is it a powerful anti-war movie? Do you have to be shallow and/or unthinking to say that the early Woody Allen is the best? Sex in

Love and Death and early Allen. Compare Allen to Chaplin, to Marx Bros., to W. C. Fields, to Bob Hope;

April 9: Relationship of Allen's biography to the film Annie Hall; What's anhedonia and are anhedonia and Annie Hall the same thing? Why did Annie Hall win the Oscar? Relationship between popularity and merit? Identity aesthetics and group identity--do you have to be Jewish to really understand and appreciate Woody?

April 14, 16: Are Allen's early comedies, and specifically Annie Hall and Manhattan amoral, moral, immoral--does it matter? Manhattan and the difference between black-and-white and color; the relationship between Ike and Tracy: is it sick? Healthy? And what issues does it get at? Is this movie misogynist? Explain and evaluate Woody Allen's list of the good things of life in this movie; is this a great film? A weird film? A bad film?

April 21, 23: Stardust Memories Fellini—Woody the rip-off: yes or no? Why do Allen viewers split so drastically on this film—it's loved and reviled—why? “Celebrity” as a subject matter in Allen (you might want to compare Stardust Memories with Celebrity). What is the character of the Woody-Sandy figure like, and is this character different from the earlier “Woody” figures(s)? What is the effect of so many grotesque images of people in the film, and why did Allen make grotesque vision such a big part of this film? Which train (from the start of the film) are you on?

April 28, 30: Zelig as a major work of 20th c. history and art; the psychology of Zelig; what is heroism in the modern world? Why would world-class intellectuals participate in a Woody Allen movie?—in this movie? What has this movie to say about conformity and group identity? Compare relevant aspects of Oscar-winning Chicago with this movie.

May 5, 7: Broadway Danny Rose as a vision of show biz in American life. The relationship of BDR to The Godfather, The Sopranos, and America's obsession with the Mafia as entertainment; the morality of Danny Rose; why do nice guys finish last (and do they?). Is Hannah and Her Sisters optimistic, pessimistic, idealistic, or cynical? Is Hannah admirable or deeply-flawed? Is Michael Caine right or

wrong for his part? How would you judge the acting in Hannah and Her Sisters?

May 12, 14: Why is The Purple Rose of Cairo both Woody's and Mia's favorite film they made together? Purple Rose: comedy or tragedy or what? Does art justify life? Compare Buster Keaton's Sherlock Jr. with The Purple Rose; The portrayal of women in PRC? Tom or Gill: what's the right choice?

May 19, 21: What are the qualities of this film (Crimes and Misdemeanors) that make it suitable (or unsuitable) to assign to Intro. To Humanities courses for all freshmen? Do the two halves of this movie work well together or do the jangle and weaken the work? Is the movie cynical? Is it morally scary? Is it a great movie? What is a great movie? Who is Primo Levi?

May 28: Analyze two major characters in Husbands and Wives. How has Allen's attitude towards sex and marriage changed over his movie-making career—or has it? Discuss the effect of the camera work and the interview technique in Husbands and Wives. Analyze Mia Farrow's performance—does he reflect her personal trauma in any of her scenes or not? The break-up of Allen and Farrow.

June 2, 4: Deconstructing Harry: why has Allen become loathed by many of his former fans? Is Deconstructing Harry an immoral film? Is it decadent, racist, or nasty? What is the relationship between art and life in this film? In Allen generally? Why, in a time when Allen is politically incorrect in so many ways, is he still popular with many?

READING ASSIGNMENTS

Texts

Allen, Getting Even, Side Effects, Without Feathers

Bjorkman, Woody Allen on Woody Allen (Grove)

Bailey, Peter. J., The Reluctant Art Film Art of Woody Allen
(recommended)

Course Reader (to be arranged)

Read the film scripts for:

Annie Hall

Manhattan

Stardust Memories

Zelig

Broadway Danny Rose

The Purple Rose of Cairo

Hannah and her Sisters

Interiors