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SENSUAL POLYPHONY OF WILDE, SHAW, DOSTOYEVSKY AND SHAKESPEARE IN WOODY ALLEN'S FILMS

ALLEN'S BIO IN BRIEF

Woody Allen is certainly one of the most important contemporary American filmmakers, and also one of the most versatile. During his 58-year-long career, he has demonstrated a multi-faceted talent for screenwriting and directing. His development in these fields can be witnessed through his vast array of films starting from *What's New Pussycat* (1965) to his fiftieth film *Coup de Chance* (2023).¹

Woody Allen was born as Allan Stewart Konigsberg on December 1, 1935, in a hospital in the Bronx, New York City. He grew up in Brooklyn within a family of Jewish immigrants, where at home everyone spoke Yiddish. Allan's mother, Nettie, the daughter of an Austrian immigrant, was an accountant, and father Martin had various jobs, including a barman, an engraver, and a taxi driver. In the first seven years of life, Allan Konigsberg moved as often as twelve times, but only within the Brooklyn area.² As a young boy Allan spent a lot of time at the cinema. In addition to his love of movies, he wrote jokes and gags for New York newspapers. In the spring of 1952, he adopted the pseudonym Woody Allen because he was shy, and did not want his classmates to see his name in the newspaper. The other reason was the belief that his new name and surname—unlike those given to him

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¹ There were times when he made two movies per year, for example, *Radio Days* and *September* in 1987, *Oedipus Wrecks* and *Crimes and Misdemeanors* in 1989, *Shadows and Fog* and *Husbands and Wives* in 1992.

² Florence COLOMBANI, *Masters of Cinema. Woody Allen* (Paris: Cashiers Du Cinema, 2007), 8.

by his parents—would sound cheerful and be more befitting of a person with a sense of humor. Moreover, he believed that in show business, a nickname would give a new identity.³

Every day, after classes at Midwood High School, Allen commuted from Brooklyn to Manhattan by subway. During the thirty-five-minute journey he was able to write about twenty-five jokes. While he was waiting to see his agent David O. Alber, he was able to write about twenty-five jokes, which took him three hours at most. For all these jokes he earned twenty dollars a week.⁴ In September 1953, Woody Allen was accepted into the University of New York. His parents dreamt that he would be a pharmacist; however, their expectations were not met, because after less than two years Allen was dismissed from the university. Around this time, he became interested in the work of the Swedish director Ingmar Bergman. It was after seeing *Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953) that he went on to be an enthusiast of European cinema.

In 1960, he was hired by the Garry Moore Show on CBS and within two years Allen became one of the most popular stand-up comedians in New York. The audience laughed at the small, neurotic, bespectacled Jew, who wielded sarcasm like no one had done before. Allen showed talent when it came to pastiche and parody. Following in the footsteps of the Marx Brothers, he often used absurdity. Inspired by his recent successes, Allen began to try his hand at film.⁵ However, his first film experience—*What's New Pussycat?* (1965, dir. Clive Donner) and *Casino Royale* (1967, dir. Val Guest, John Huston, Joseph McGrath, Ken Hughes, Robert Parrish)—left him feeling disappointed with films due to his limited involvement in their production. Disenchanted by the fact that his ideas were ineptly realized, he decided to demand greater participation in film making. Jack Rollins and Charles H. Joffe, who promoted Allen as a stand-upper, negotiated contracts with United Artists in the early 1970s to give Woody Allen the freedom and independence to produce his films.⁶ Since then Woody Allen has usually written scripts himself, chosen the cast, the location, and has a decisive voice in the technical process of film making, even at the post-

³ Eric LAX, *Woody Allen. Rozmowy. Rozmowy z lat 1971-2009* (New York, Toronto: Axis Mundi, 2014), 14.

⁴ Tom SHONE, *Woody Allen. A Retrospective* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015), 15.

⁵ COLOMBANI, *Masters of Cinema. Woody Allen*, 14–16.

⁶ James F. SCOTT, *Martin Scorsese, Woody Allen, Spike Lee. Ethnicity, Race, and Identity in American Independent Film* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019), 114.

production stage. In *Woody Allen: Interviews*, Robert E. Kapsis noted, “Unlike other filmmakers, Allen has enjoyed almost complete autonomy as a director, making exactly the films he wants to make.”⁷ Kapsis rightly points out that Woody Allen played lead or supporting roles in many of his films, creating a recognizable figure of an intellectual neurotic or a lifelong loser. In using this persona, he had started to make a career by focusing on entertaining films, such as *Take the Money and Run* (1969), *Bananas* (1971), *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex but Were Afraid to Ask* (1972), and *Sleeper* (1973). Soon Allen began to be included in the pantheon of comedy artists alongside the Marx Brothers, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin. In addition to wacky comedies, Allen began writing and directing more complicated films such as *Love and Death* (1975), *Annie Hall* (1977), *Manhattan* (1979), called bittersweet comedies, and later made more dramatic films: *Interiors* (1978), *September* (1987), and *Another Woman* (1988).

The 1980s are a period of his critically acclaimed films—*A Midsummer Night’s Sex Comedy* (1982), *Zelig* (1983), *Broadway Dany Rose* (1984), *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986), *Radio Days* (1987), *September* (1987), *Another Woman* (1988), *Oedipus Wrecks (New York Stories)* (1989), and *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989). According to Kapsis, the golden period in Allen’s work was 1987–1992, when he created films that were particularly provocative and original, such as *Alice* (1990), *Shadows and Fog* (1991) and *Husbands and Wives* (1992). Since the early 1990s, there has been a wave of criticism of his work and he was accused of “repeating himself” which resulted in his reluctance to give interviews. According to Kapsis, Allen is one of the filmmakers the least likely to give interviews, but since the mid-1980s he has been more willing to do so abroad, especially to Europeans.⁸

Allen often played the role of an antihero, a man colloquially referred to as *schlemazel* and *nebbish*, treated with disdain by other characters, but who at one point showed endurance and cunning. His statements, full of self-irony and sarcasm, prompted the viewer to reflect. According to Sander H. Lee,

⁷ Robert E. KAPSIS, *Woody Allen. Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), ix.

⁸ KAPSIS, *Woody Allen: Interviews*, ix–x.

Allen's distinctive wit is the thread running through all the characters he has played. Allen's humor imposes an existential running, commentary on all the events in his films, a commentary which proclaims his unique identity and his rebellion against the traditional behavior of others.... Allen uses humor to distance himself from others and proclaim his ultimate autonomy.⁹

BAKHTIN'S THEORIES AND ALLEN'S FILMS

Allen's comedies are like everlasting carnivals, where the atmosphere is full of humor and chaos. They seem to be a celebration of freedom, equality and abundance. His dramas are marked by a profanation of rules which are generally sacred or at least widely respected. Most of Allen's films are anti-elitist, showing the dysfunctionality of hierarchical relationships and characters who often behave in inappropriate, provocative and revolting ways. Their characters speak freely having equal voices. They are like Rabelais's images who "are completely at home within the thousand-year-old development of popular culture".¹⁰

In order to analyze the films: *Small Time Crooks* (2000), *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), *Match Point* (2005) and *Irrational Man* (2015), I am going to refer to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of polyphony which originated in *Problems of Dostoevsky Poetics* and his concept of the carnivalesque, which was developed as "carnival" in *Rabelais and His World*.

Apparently, as Mikhail Bakhtin suggests, a work can be classified as carnivalesque if it has the certain features. One of them is eccentricity which manifest itself in the reversal of hierarchies or the dissolution of hierarchical relationships.

The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was of particular significance.... All were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age. The hierarchical background and the extreme corporative and caste divisions of the medieval social order were exceptionally strong. Therefore, such free, familiar contacts were deeply felt and formed an essential element of the carnival

⁹ Sander H. LEE, *Eighteen Woody Allen Films Analyzed. Anguish, God and Existentialism* (Jefferson: Mc Farland & Company, 2002), 9.

¹⁰ Mikhail BAKHTIN, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 3.

spirit. People were ... reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only fruit of imagination or abstract thought: they were experienced.¹¹

Such a carnival is an inside-out world, and is a “joyful relativity of all structure and order”. When the world is “inside out” as Bakhtin points out, “a second life, a second world of folk culture is thus constructed”,¹² strict rules of piety and respect for official notion are profaned, while ungodliness, obscenity, blasphemy and parodies on things that are sacred are seen as tolerable. Bakhtin observed:

We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic ... of the “turnabout” of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of a numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings. A second world of folk culture is thus constructed.¹³

In such a situation characters behave in inappropriate, provoking and repulsive ways. Their unacceptable gestures and discourse become acceptable. A lack of the hierarchy is also connected with a suspension of distance between people who are encouraged to communicate in a different way than in normal, everyday life. The participants in carnival liberate themselves from norms of etiquette, interacting and expressing themselves freely. They reveal their hidden sides and become familiar to one another.¹⁴ Such a format of carnival allows *carnivalistic mesalliances*: the high and the low, the new and the old, the wisdom and the stupidity, the sacred and the profane, the angel and the devil.

All dualistic separations of the hierarchical worldview are able to reunite in a living relationship with one another. Carnivalistic symbols always include their opposite within themselves: “Birth is fraught with death, and death with new birth.” The crowning implies the de-crowning, and the de-crowning implies a new crowning. It is thus the process of change itself that is celebrated, not that which is changed. The people’s second life during the carnival is structured on the basis of laughter.

¹¹ Mikhail BAKHTIN, “Carnival Ambivalence,” in *The Bakhtin Reader. Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov*, ed. Pam Morris (London: Arnold, 1994), 194–206.

¹² BAKHTIN, 200.

¹³ BAKHTIN, *Rabelais and His World*, 11.

¹⁴ BAKHTIN, “Carnival Ambivalence,” 200.

Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants.... Third, this laughter is ambivalent ... triumphant and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival.¹⁵

As it is based in the physiological realities of the lower bodily stratum: birth, death, renewal, sexuality, ingestion, evacuation etc., it is inherently anti-elitist: its objects and functions are necessarily common to all humans—"identical, involuntary and non-negotiable". Moreover, everyone is on an equal footing, and takes part in the carnival—it seems to be a democratic celebration. Bakhtin claims:

Carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part.¹⁶

The lack of authoritarianism, where all voices are equally valid, creates a kind of polyphony. All the dialogs create a specific melody where two or more simultaneous lines coexist. Such situation transports us to Bakhtin's theory of polyphony in Dostoevsky's novels. He asserts that the author of *Crime and Punishment*

is the creator of the polyphonic novel.... In his works a hero appears whose voice is constructed exactly like the voice of the author himself in a novel of the usual type. A character's word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author's word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character's objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author's voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, alongside the author's word and

¹⁵ BAKHTIN, 200.

¹⁶ BAKHTIN, 198.

in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters.¹⁷

Thus, in Dostoevsky's novels there are a multiplicity of contradictory voices which are equal in relation to each other. Most importantly, all these stances are not overpowered, nor are they guided by the omnipotent and superior voice of the author. The reader of Dostoevsky's novel according to Bakhtin, has the impression that he "is dealing not with a single author—artist who wrote novels and stories, but with a number of philosophical statements by several author-thinkers—Raskolnikov, Myshkin, Stavrogin, Ivan Karamazov, the Grand Inquisitor, and others."¹⁸ The reader is presented with many different characters who represent distinct perspectives and original desires. These perspectives unfold and develop freely. The plurality of independent and emerged views together with the consciousness of genuine polyphony of fully valid voices are in fact the chief characteristics of Dostoevsky's novels. For Bakhtin this way of writing encapsulates the dialogic principle or the way in which writing can be multi-voiced: made up of many dialogs, many coexisting perspectives.

The concept of polyphony also characterizes Woody Allen's films. Every single person is engaged in a constant dialog with other perspectives, with diverse environments and different ways of conducting life. The characters are not guided by one single-voiced authority but are allowed to have equal rights of expression. In addition, Allen conducts a constant dialog with other directors, writers and philosophers. He agrees or polemizes with them mostly in a humorous way, copying their styles to create a pastiche or a parody. The reference to other artistic work takes the form of a carnival.

Allen quite often uses contrasts in his films: for example, a believer and an atheist in *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, rich and poor in *Blue Jasmine*, and love of life and destruction in *Irrational Man*. He also uses inversion when it comes to social hierarchy. One such example is in the comedy *Deconstructing Harry*: a prostitute named Cookie accompanies a famous writer at a celebration of a prize distribution, where later the same writer is arrested for kidnapping his son. Hence, she appears to have been elevated to a higher status, while the writer takes on the form of a low-life criminal. Moreover, the Woody Allen persona behaves in an eccentric way, fre-

¹⁷ Mikhail BAKHTIN, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 7.

¹⁸ BAKHTIN, 5.

quently socially unacceptable (*Deconstructing Harry*, *Take the Money and Run*, *Play It Again, Sam*). Another important feature of Allen's films is their lack of chronology, which in a discursive sense is connected with the carnivalesque category (for example in *Annie Hall* and *Stardust Memories*). This nonlinear pattern of the story, the kind which has disjointed events, seems to be connected to postmodern film making. That is Allen's carnival: his parodic film is the expression of laughter.

SOPHISTICATED SENSES? POLYPHONIC DANCE
WITH SHAW, WILDE AND STEVENSON

The main character of Oscar Wilde's novel *Dorian Gray* and his "teacher of life" Lord Henry Wotton, make a relationship which is reminiscent of the male-male relationship during the Hellenistic period known as *pederasty*. The older man is teaching his muse, a young beautiful boy to appreciate art, how to become a man and how to live a meaningful life:

I believe that if one man is to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream—I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of medievalism and reform to the Hellenistic ideal.... The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself.¹⁹

Lord Henry talks about living your dreams, and enjoying life in a hedonistic way instead of being repressed by strict, medieval rules. Yielding to temptation seems to be an act of liberation of restraint which is also suspended during carnivals. It may also include the concept of indulgence of all sensual sensation. Dorian, under the influence and power of his mentor, becomes obsessed with youth and beauty. He is ready to give up his soul if his portrait gets old instead of him. He wishes:

If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that—for that—I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!"²⁰

¹⁹ Oscar WILDE, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 21.

²⁰ WILDE, 28.

“Allen’s Dorian”, named David (Hugh Grant) in the film *Small Time Crooks* (2000) is, in contrast, not a pupil but a teacher of the much lower-class Frenchy (Tracey Ullman), who luckily makes a fortune in the cookie business. David is not a model of the painting like Gray in Wilde’s book, he is a private art dealer and a businessman who used to be a stockbroker and vineyard owner. Despite his experience, he still looks young, because, as he joked, “somewhere in the closet there’s a portrait of me ageing.”

Allen’s world is upside down to what Wilde created as it lacks homoeroticism and does not remind us of the Hellenistic male-male education; it is rather a male-female education. While Wilde’s protagonist sir Wotton looks down on women as the weaker and less intellectual gender who is not able to discuss philosophy, literature or art, Allen’s male protagonists appreciate Frenchy as stronger, smarter and more diligent student than her husband. As an ambitious pupil who is ready to do anything to become a patron of arts, she pays David for lessons on theatre, *savoir-vivre*, classical music, literature and wine. Her plan is to develop sophisticated senses of hearing, sight, smell and taste. She employs a French chef, who introduces truffles into the Winklers’ diet, starts going to museums, elegant parties and concerts. Meanwhile, in the process of teaching, David points out to her that their relationship is similar to that of Professor Higgins and Eliza Doolittle:

- David: Well, I’ve ... got a little present for you....
 Frenchy: Oh... pretty. I love leather books. Oh, *Pygmalion*. I love that story, David.
 David: There’s a little inscription.
 Frenchy: “To my favorite Eliza, from your Professor Higgins, love David.”

Frenchy, however, seems to be an older version of Eliza; instead of selling flowers in the street, Frenchy sells cookies (which do not just smell amazing but also taste delicious) and instead of studying phonetics, she studies the dictionary by heart. Thus, Allen’s *Small Times Crooks* is “turn-about” and a modern mixture of *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde.

However, unlike Oscar Wilde, who believed in the idea that art existed for art’s sake, Allen’s characters are unaware that their acts are acts of utilitarianism. Frenchy does not seem to be an esthete, she does not treat art just for reasons of beauty; for her, art “serves” to impress the elegant social scene. She basically needs the knowledge of art to be able to communicate

with the upper class. Although Frenchy has already had the sweet palate—her cookies are the best in the city—her willingness to develop other senses appear to be instrumental in her desire for growth. She opens the door for David to deceive her and buys a painting from him, the beauty of which she does not really “experience”, and does not even know its real value.

David’s personality is also a distorted reflection of professor Higgins’ character who is teaching the working class Liza out of an ambitious impulse—to contribute to science. Higgins reveals his attitude while talking to Colonel Pickering:

A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere—no right to live.... You see this creature with her kerbstone English: the English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador’s garden party. I could even get her a place as lady’s maid or shop assistant which requires better English. That’s the sort of thing I do for commercial millionaires. And on the profit of it I do genuine scientific work in phonetics, and a little as a poet on Miltonic lines.²¹

David is teaching Frenchy to become a lady, but the real reason is to get her use her fortune for his own gain. He shows his real standpoint during conversation with his business partner:

Oliver: Can’t believe you found a buyer for the Damon Dexter so fast and at such good price. That’ll really take a bite out of our debts.
 David: Oliver, it’s dawning on me that the opportunity has arisen for me to become quite, er, obscenely rich.
 Oliver: They’re serious about an art collection?
 David: No, that would be peanuts.
 Oliver: What, then?
 David: Well, I think that she might be falling for me.
 Oliver: Frenchy Winkler?
 David: How much do you think she’s worth, roughly?
 Oliver: Her husband, you mean?
 David: No, it’s all in her name. She’s a cookie noble.
 Oliver: What are you saying?
 David: Don’t know, I suppose I’m saying that, you know, that people grow and marriages sadly break up and women remarry, you know? Fortunes, they change hands.

²¹ George Bernard SHAW, *Pygmalion* (New York: Garden City, 2015), 12.

David is saying all these words with a different facial expression. Suddenly he becomes cold and cynical. In the last scenes, Frenchy reaches the conclusion that David has been a two-faced liar. It turns out that the darker side of his personality dominates his behavior, almost like Robert Louis Stevenson's Mr. Hyde, who would eventually conquer Dr. Jekyll.

SENSES OF SIGHT, TASTE, TOUCH AND HEARING.
THE DIALOG WITH DOSTOYEVSKY AND SHAKESPEARE

In his films, Woody Allen quite frequently polemicizes with other film makers, philosophers, psychologists and writers: one of them is undeniably Fyodor Dostoyevsky. The dialog with the Russian classic mainly concentrates on the themes connected with ethics and religion. While problems of integrity are dominant in Dostoyevsky's and Shakespeare's works, the issue of senses and pleasure seem to take center stage in Allen's films. Despite the different attitude to the problem of ethical values, Allen copies Dostoyevsky's style: his protagonists' voices are equal, there is no superior voice. On the other hand, he mocks Dostoyevsky's beliefs: Allen's stories are a reversal of Dostoyevsky's. Allen's films are like a carnival ball, where all Dostoyevsky's characters dress up in opposite costumes to their real personalities.

In films *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), *Match Point* (2005) and *Irrational Man* (2015), Allen shows a world without ethical structure or moral meaning. The protagonists Judah Rosenthal (Martin Landau), Chris Wilton (Jonathan Rhys Meyers) and professor Abe Lucas (Joaquin Phoenix) think and act in a narcissistic way, eliminating individuals who should in their opinion die. While Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*) is a hero who takes full responsibility for his deeds and has the courage to confess his crime, Judah (*Crimes and Misdemeanors*) and Chris (*Match Point*) are anti-heroes: they do what is convenient, preferring material stability to doing the right thing. Unlike Raskolnikov's situation (extreme poverty), and the reasons which led him into crime (his willingness to rescue his sister from getting married and readiness to free the society from the evil moneylender), Allen's protagonists' "necessity" to kill was caused by their hedonistic lifestyle, which at first whetted the senses, and then triggered problems. Raskolnikov kills the woman who is hated. Allen's Judah and Chris kill their lovers.

Interestingly, Abe (*Irrational Man*) belongs to a different category of characters: he is a funny version of the anti-hero who has no doubt that his deed was a moral act of justice. Abe makes notes while reading *Crime and Punishment*—his analysis is supposed to help him when he plans to commit a crime. In contrast, in one of the first scenes in *Match Point*, Chris Wilton is reading *Crime and Punishment* and then he reaches for *The Cambridge Companion to Crime and Punishment*. In this way Allen shows that reading Dostoyevsky's book is too difficult for Chris. In opposition to Dostoyevsky's novel, in the above films, it is clear that the main characters do not take responsibility for their deeds. Unlike the student Raskolnikov, who gets depressed after the act of killing, Professor Abe puts an end to his depression and starts living. In a way, murdering the person who is socially harmful makes Abe happy. After the act of murder, all of Abe's senses are all awoken. He can suddenly see the world in brighter colors. He is celebrating life by having abundant meals and enjoying passionate sex. He admits "I feel like I've accomplished something worthwhile. Like my life has meaning." While studying Dostoyevsky, he apparently ignores the ethical and spiritual parts of the novel. He focuses on carnal pleasure which is enhanced after the need for "justice" has been fulfilled.

Similarly, Chris attaches a greater importance to sensuality, indulgence and luck than to ethics. He scorns his religious father, claiming "faith is the path of least resistance" and treating Dostoyevsky's novel as a perfect crime guide. An analogous attitude is represented by Judah Rosenthal. He does not concur with his father—the Orthodox Jew, who said: "The eyes of God see all.... There's absolutely nothing that escapes his sight. He sees the righteous and he sees the wicked. And the righteous will be rewarded. But the wicked will be punished. For eternity." Ironically, Judah is an eye doctor who treats patients with sick vision while he himself seems to be morally blind. Allen uses the sense of sight as a metaphor for moral insight and blindness. According to Sam B. Girgus, the phrase "eyes of God" also indicate how the director "wants the camera and his filmmaking to look within and to bring out that world of art".²² Allen's camera is the eye which is supposed to see the protagonist's soul. The director

employs what can be called a form of interior camera from the beginning of *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. His technique involves a systematic use and inter-

²² Sam B. GIRGUS, *The Films of Woody Allen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 135.

connection of close-ups and flashbacks to explore and chart this interior geography. This artistic “style” ... operates with powerful authority and effect, becoming a visual motif that runs throughout the film.²³

When Judah reads the letter from his lover Dolores (Anjelica Huston) to his wife Miriam (Claire Bloom), the camera puts our eyes in Judah’s eyes. At the same time, we are listening to the lover’s voice—the words of the letter. It is in this scene that the viewer can see Judah’s eyes and the expression which shows his anxiety. The audience also observe flashbacks to Judah’s childhood, which offers insight into Judah’s religious and traditional upbringing. While planning the murder, Judah’s thoughts are materialized through a dialog with his conscience represented by Rabbi Ben (Sam Waterston):

Judah: What choice do I have, Ben? Tell me?

Ben: Give the people that you’ve hurt a chance to forgive you.... It’s a human life. You don’t think God sees?

Judah: God is a luxury I can’t afford.... I will not be destroyed by this neurotic woman.

Ben: But the law, Judah. Without the law, it’s all darkness.

The conflict is taking place within Judah who deep down is looking for arguments to justify the right to kill. His main worry, which makes him take more time to think, is whether God can see the sin. The other, his biggest problem is connected with the consequences of committing a murder which would be living in “darkness”.

In *Crimes and Misdemeanors* Judah’s father Sol (David S. Howard) emphasizes, “Whether it’s the Old Testament or Shakespeare, murder will out.” Thus, Allen mocks not just the Motion Picture Production Code (popularly known as the Hays Code), but classical tragedy as well: this is where the crime is revealed and the evil is punished. The director’s ridicule is not expressed directly, but rather through irony—camouflaged mockery, in which the hidden proper sense is in contradiction to the literal sense.²⁴ In metaphorical meaning, irony is the state of affairs or events which are contrary to the expectations.²⁵ The errors in Chris Wilton’s crime (*Match*

²³ GIRGUS, 137.

²⁴ Bohdan DZIEMIDOK, “O głównych formach komizmu,” *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie Skłodowska. Sectio F, Nauki Humanistyczne i Filozoficzne* 16 (1961): 72.

²⁵ D. S. MUECKE, “Ironia: Podstawowe klasyfikacje,” *Pamiętnik literacki* 77, no. 1 (1986): 245.

Point) and lack of professionalism persuade the viewer that the murderer will be caught. Allen suggests Wilton's short-sightedness through the ghost of his lover Nola (Scarlett Johansson), who brings him the message "Prepare to pay the price Chris. Your actions were clumsy. Full of holes. Almost like someone begging to be found out." Why is the end so inappropriate, then?

According to Robert M. Polhemus,

Match Point focuses on characters and a modern world set off against the cultural heritage of tragic art.... Taking his title from the decisive moment in tennis, Allen makes its explosive points out of the collision in this match of love and death.... He narrows his focus in order to make the vision of unjustified violence, unpunished homicide, and unmitigated evil.²⁶

Polhemus also indicates Allen's references to Shakespearean *Othello* as he uses the soundtrack from the Act II of the opera by Giuseppe Verdi, during which the demonic Iago urges Moor to kill his wife Desdemona. Interestingly, Allen does not identify Chris with Othello, but rather with Iago as both Chris and Iago are manipulative sociopaths.²⁷ In the last scene, Allen refers again to Shakespeare but this time using the soundtrack from Verdi's *Macbeth*, which lyrics "O figli, o figli miei!" ("Oh my children / You have all been killed by that tyrant, / Together with your poor mother!").²⁸ At the same time the viewers experience the power and beauty of music which escalates the sense of terror and creepiness of the story in the film. The sense of hearing correlates with the picture of the awfulness, which is even more accentuated at the end of the film when we realize that the crime is not punished.

This is not the first time Allen has polemicized with Shakespeare in correlation with classical music. He also does that in a light, humorous way in the movie *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* (1982), which is derived from Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ironically, Allen uses Felix Mendelssohn's overture entitled *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as the soundtrack. The viewer's sense of hearing is excited as the music creates a special atmosphere. Allen combines classical music, which represents high culture,

²⁶ Robert M. POLPHEMUS, "Comic Faith and Its Discontents. Death and the Late Woody," in *A Companion to Woody Allen*, ed. Peter J. Bailey and Sam B. Girgus (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 120.

²⁷ POLPHEMUS, 125.

²⁸ POLPHEMUS, 121.

with liberating contemporary setting full of desire and sex. In addition, he adapted this Shakespeare's play, which had been historically part of an upper-class celebration, into the film whose plot reminds a pop carnival. The sense of touch becomes a favored way of communication as it is supposed to guarantee fulfilment and happiness. The film is also "overtly based on a combination of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Ingmar Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955), mixing Renaissance and modern sources to create a sense of timelessness, or at least ahistoricity".²⁹

CONCLUSION

I decided to analyze the aforementioned films, because they focus on the senses in opposition to referred literature which concentrates on ethics: Allen created an opposite world to Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Wilde, and Shaw.

Allen especially emphasizes the sense of taste and flavor in *Small Time Crooks*. Although the heroine, Frenchy, has already had the sense of "democratic taste", she wants to develop the "aristocratic taste". In *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, the main motif is "the eyes of God" which symbolize the omniscient camera lens which has insight in protagonists' souls and which constitute the metaphor of moral vision. The feast of senses especially those of hearing are presented in *Match Point*, where classical music compounds the terror of the homicides, whereas the senses of flavor and sexual touch are awakened in *Irrational Man*.

Like in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novels, in Woody Allen's films, there are a variety of opposing opinions which are fully weighted and equal to one another. All these attitudes are not overwhelmed and not guided by the omnipotent and superior voice of the author-creator, but independent and likewise valid. The viewer of Allen's films is like the reader of Dostoyevsky's novels: they might have the impression that they are dealing not with a single director-artist or scriptwriter but with a number of philosophical statements by several author-thinkers: Judah, Chris, Nola, Abe, Ben, Judah's father Sol, etc. Thus, the viewer is presented with many different characters who represent distinct perspectives and original standpoints which are revealed freely.

²⁹ M. Keith BOOKER, *Postmodern Hollywood. What's New in Film and Why It Makes Us Feel So Strange* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 54.

Moreover, Allen's films are liberated from the conventional understanding of reality, stereotypes and Hollywood's diegetic world. The director creates a setting where a *carnivalistic mesalliance* is allowed to speak and exist: both high and popular culture, fiction and reality, a ghost and a real person, the upper class and working class. All attempt to connect a cultural heritage of art in Allen's postmodern films, where the director's laughter is mocking and deriding, targeting everything and everyone.

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SENSUAL POLYPHONY OF WILDE, SHAW, DOSTOYEVSKY
AND SHAKESPEARE IN WOODY ALLEN'S FILMS

Summary

Woody Allen's comedies are like a perpetual carnival, filled with festivity and laughter—a time when most senses are awoken, and participants celebrate freedom and equality. His dramas are marked by a profanation of rules which are generally sacred or at least widely respected.

The author of the article analyzes several of Woody Allen's films, referring to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory on polyphony and his concept of the carnivalesque. Allen's films are upside down worlds of such classics as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Pygmalion*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Othello* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The director conducts a constant dialog with other artists, writers, philosophers and even God. He agrees or polemizes with them on subjects concerning a whole range of emotions and senses mostly in a humorous or ironic way, copying different styles to create a pastiche, a parody, or his own version of drama.

Keywords: carnival; literature; senses; film; dialog

ZMYSŁOWA POLIFONIA WILDE' A, SHAWA, DOSTOJEWSKIEGO I SZEKSPIRA
W FILMACH WOODY'EGO ALLENA

Streszczenie

Komedie Woody'ego Allena są jak nieustający karnawał, pełen zabaw, wesołości i śmiechu — jest to czas, kiedy wszystkie zmysły są pobudzone, a uczestnicy cieszą się wolnością i równością. Jego dramaty są nacechowane profanacją zasad, które powszechnie uznawane są za święte, a przynajmniej są ogólnie respektowane. Większość filmów Allena jest antyelitarna; pokazuje niejednokrotnie dysfunkcjonalność hierarchicznych relacji oraz ukazuje postaci, które często zachowują się w niestosowny, prowokujący, a nawet odpychający sposób. Autorka niniejszego artykułu analizuje wybrane filmy Woody'ego Allena, nawiązując do teorii Michaiła Bachtina na temat polifonii oraz jego konceptu karnawalizacji. Filmy te są odwróconymi światami takich klasyków jak *Portret Doriany Graya*, *Pigmalion*, *Zbrodnia i kara* oraz *Otello*. Reżyser stale prowadzi dialog z innymi artystami, pisarzami, filozofami, a nawet z Bogiem. Zgadza się lub polemizuje z nimi na tematy dotyczące różnego rodzaju emocji i zmysłów w humorystyczny lub ironiczny sposób.

Słowa kluczowe: karnawał; zbrodnia; zmysły; kara; dialog

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