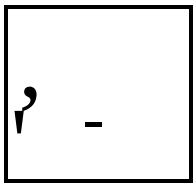

„GOD, SHE IS BEAUTIFUL . . .":

THE DISTURBING REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN *HANNAH AND HER SISTERS*

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WOODY ALLEN has been described as "a mirror of the American New Man"; a man who has adapted himself to the demands of a culture defined as "deconstructionist, post-feminist and post-Vietnam" (Babington and Evans 1989: 152). In his films, Allen attempts to inscribe a wide range of spectatorship by combining traditional film issues, such as love and sex, with sophisticated parodic and metafictional forms. If the former are addressed to a wide audience, the latter clearly try to appeal to a minority audience capable of recognising references not only to Classical Hollywood films but also to European cinema. The paradoxical mixture of the popular and the academic inscribes Allen within postmodernism.

Postmodern art has been accused of being either highly revolutionary or conservative. This essay tries to discuss the ideological scope of *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986) in relation to gender and sexual difference, considering the importance of films as a source of information about society and human behaviour. Although in most American films there is a tendency to reflect, to a certain extent, dominant ideas, interests and values, an important number of films have challenged and altered them, providing different ways of understanding the world. In order to see whether Allen supports or questions the dominant patriarchal order I will analyse the visual and narrative mechanisms involved in the filmic representation of men and women and,

secondly, the intertextual aspects bearing on the representation of the different characters, especially their relationship with the conventions of classical comedy. In this paper the notion of intertextuality is taken in its largest sense, that is, I will consider not only other texts alluded explicitly or implicitly in the text, but also the Classical Hollywood mode, generic influence, Allen's previous works and stardom. Although the latter instances of intertextuality (genre and stardom) are usually neglected, Worton and Still (1990: 176) have pointed out their importance as unavoidably inscribed interactions with other filmic texts.

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Semiotic theorists have pointed out that "cinematic signifiers, like their linguistic counterparts, are activated only within discourse, and that discourse always requires an enunciating agency" (Silverman 1988: 10-11). This enunciating agency is usually perceived by the viewer as "an unseen agency of control" from the very moment s/he becomes aware of the visual constraint marked by the frame (Silverman 1988: 11). Classical cinema has developed a system of enunciation that controls the spectator's access to the film. This system uses mechanisms from various film codes in order to enhance the realistic effect of the camera which presents images as from real life — camera as window to the world— and to reinforce the privileged viewing position of the spectator. Thus the classical narrative mode dictates certain rules that attempt to deny the existence of the camera as a technological device controlling the spectator's gaze (Dayan 1974). However, Woody Allen, like some other film directors (even classical ones),[1] makes us, viewers, constantly aware of the presence of the camera, underlying the limits of the visual enunciator, as well as using surrogates for that "absent one."

Hannah and Her Sisters consists of thirteen sections; each of them introduced by a title that more or less loosely sets up their thematic contents. The film opens with the title for the first section, "God, she's beautiful..." Immediately after, we hear those same words pronounced by a male voice-over and see a medium close-up of Lee (Barbara Hershey). A whole monologue continues while the camera follows Lee, in centre frame, moving around inside a flat and greeting people. The camera stops on Elliot (Michael Caine) when she passes in front of him; at this very moment, the viewer, retroactively, identifies the voice-over as Elliot's interior monologue and the

previous shots of Lee as his point-of-view shots. In these first shots, Elliot seems to be the character equipped with authoritative vision, hearing and speech that inscribes the viewer within the film's diegesis. In so doing, the first male-female relationship is articulatated in a form of representation that corresponds to classical cinema's scopic and auditory modes (Silverman 1988: 31): woman as the pleasurable object for the male gaze and voice. This Hollywood convention that positions men as actors and women as spectacle was first pointed out by Laura Mulvey in her seminal article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). If we follow Silverman (1988: 54), this primary association of the male voice and gaze with the apparent point of discursive origin is immediately disavowed. Elliot's voice-over expresses thoughts rather than speech, showing an internal register that contributes to diegetic immediacy and does not belong to the external enunciating subject. For Silverman diegetic interiority is equated with discursive impotence and lack of control, usually confined to woman's voice. In this film, the viewer is provided with the interior voice-over of every main character's monologues: those of Elliot's, Lee's, Mickey's (Woody Allen), Holly's (Dianne Wiest) and Hannah's (Mia Farrow).

The titles cannot be said to belong to a unique voice —that of Elliot's. Some are sentences or phrases uttered, or thought, by different characters: "We all had a good time" is said by Lee to Frederick (Max von Sydow); "Lucky I ran into you," etc. Others are lines taken from literary works by e.e. cummings and Tolstoi. And others keep a varying thematic relation to the main theme of the section introduced by them. The titles, then, are not the constructed surrogate for the enunciating subject, but they rather reveal the filmic text as an artificial construct. This is one instance of formal intertextual relationship with what was called "primitive cinema" or "early cinema," the cinematic mode developed before the classical period (1915-1955). During the primitive period, intertitles have no causality link to the image; they were used as devices to stir the spectators' memory, to remember the well-known story that appeared on screen (Bürch 1985: 117). In Allen's previous films, the artificiality of film as construct had been explicitly expressed by his direct address to the viewer, introducing himself as author and character, that is, as the enunciating subject and the subject of the enunciation. However, in *Hannah and Her Sisters,* Allen opts for an apparently neutral, anonymous voice. Despite Allen's efforts to disguise his authorship by combining the use of a non-diegetic enunciating subject with surrogates for this "absent one," a device commonly used in the classical mode, the film bears, in a covert way, his "signature" as author. Mirroring the

episodic structure of the film, Allen presents himself as a fragmented author, disguised under a multiplicity of voices and roles. As he acknowledged, the three leading male roles in the film —Mickey, Elliot and Frederick— "embody different aspects of his personality" (McCann 1990: 237):

> Mickey, played by himself, is nearest to the conventional screen 'Woody' character: a television comedy writer who quits his job, a 'little man' who wrestles with the most daunting metaphysical questions, a lover who cannot understand why the finest of intimacies sometimes give way to the greatest distances. Elliot also has that sense of moral weakness and sexual appetite glimpsed in Allen's characters in *Manhattan* and in Martin Ritt's *The Front*. Frederick reminds one especially of the Allen character in *Stardust Memories*, a man making provocative but often quite plausible criticisms of contemporary *kitsch* culture, but doing so from a pathetically detached, impotent position.

Before examining the relationship of these male characters to the three female ones, there is still a question to be answered, a question usually posed by feminist critics like Silverman: is the enunciating subject of this film gendered?; if so, is it male, female, or both? Is there in the film a female discourse that is juxtaposed on the male gaze and voice mentioned above? According to some feminist critics, one of the central mechanisms of classical Hollywood cinema has been to create tensions between seeing and being seen, subject/object, identifying in this dichotomy the male with the subject of the look and the female with the object to look at (Mulvey, 1975). With this recurrent pattern, Classical Hollywood cinema has positioned the female spectator in an apparent contradiction, being simultaneously consumer and commodity, encouraging woman to "actively participate in her own oppression" (Doane 1987: 23).

If the voice-over discloses interior monologues of both male and female characters (Elliot, Lee, Mickey, Holly and Hannah — with Frederick's uttered as "lectures" addressed to Lee), flashbacks —the discourses-within-discourse— are a privilege enjoyed mainly by Mickey and, shortly, by Elliot —never by any of the female characters. Although some of these flashbacks function as interior monologues —usually confined to female voices, according to Silverman (1988: 54)—, there is one that Mickey addresses to Holly, intending to move her and consequently the audience, with his existential crisis. In addition to this discursive difference, female characters are denied the privilege of the gaze; in other words, the camera rarely shows

female POV shots that could enable the identification of the viewer with them. Immediately after Elliot's POV shots and identification of the camera with him, the camera seems to follow the female characters, "behaving" as a limited witness, using steady long shots and framing in which the characters seem to enter and disappear in an apparently uncontrolled way —another instance of intertextuality with "primitive cinema" that points to the "theatricality" of life. The scarce number of shot-reverse shots —surrogates for the absent enunciating subject— also contributes to the spectator's awareness of the camera as visual enunciator, revealing thus the limiting scope of the framing and the artificiality of the image .

The awareness of the frame as visual constraint is heavily underlined by the use of offscreen sound and space: for instance, in the first section there is a scene in which Elliot and Lee are talking in Hannah and Elliot's bedroom and the camera moves from one speaker to the other instead of shot-reverse shot cutting. As a result, the camera focuses on the wall and furniture rather than on the character speaking at that moment, as a witness unable to follow the conversation visually. At other moments in the film, offscreen space is used to reinforce the identification of the viewer with Mickey, played by Allen. There are many instances in the film where the viewer is presented with a more or less close shot of a character looking directly at the camera, the foreground offscreen space, where the spectator is supposed to be, being occupied at that moment by Mickey. This device is used not only in Mickey's flashbacks but also in the first level of the narrative. For example, in the section entitled "The Abyss," immediately after Mickey has been told that he has no cancer, Gail (Julie Kavner), at the TV office, looks directly at the camera, the position taken by Mickey, while saying: "What d'you mean you quit?. Why? The news is good. You don't have can . . . the thing." Although he shares the leading role with other characters, the camera framing, not only the use of offscreen space, but also close-ups and centre frame, make the audience identify with him —not to mention the interaction of our viewing experience of his previous films, which make us recognise Allen's typical themes and persona in this film.

Nevertheless, although the camera emphasises its limits in establishing relationships between the characters themselves, it seems to enjoy the voyeuristic pleasure of the male gaze introduced in the first shots by means of the constant centre frame, double framing and close-ups of the female characters that are sometimes narratively unjustifiable. An interesting example of a voyeuristic close-up can be seen in the section entitled "Dusty just bought this huge house in Southampton," when Hannah is at her parents'

trying to assist her drunken mother. Her parents' argument is soothed and Evan (Lloyd Nolan), her father, is playing the compasses of "You are too Beautiful" and asking "You remember this, Hannah?" while the camera moves to a close-up of Hannah immersed in her thoughts. This close-up is long enough to create expectations in the viewer of acceding to her memories by means of a flashback or voice-over. Instead, the shot is used to enable viewers to enjoy the beauty of her face and expression —linking image to the lyrics of the song. Another interesting shot that reinforces the idea of the woman as being seen and not as seeing can be perceived in the section entitled "The big leap." There Hannah, Holly and Lee are having lunch at a restaurant and, while they are discussing Holly's career and love life, the camera moves in circles around them, getting closer and closer, in a suffocating way, as the tension of their argument grows. The camera approaches them to the limit of distortion, and it becomes hard to distinguish their different facial features and identities; all suggesting their singular configuration of the feminine split into three different characters.

However obvious the conclusion that could be drawn from the above comments, the apparent voyeuristic pleasure displayed by the camera on the male gaze's behalf is also objectivised and ridiculed in the film. In "Dusty just bought this huge house in Southampton," Elliot's leering looks at Lee's nudes drawn by Frederick are shared by the camera as it suddenly stops on them when following Lee moving around the room and making for the bookshelf. Nonetheless, this clear instance of voyeurism is also ironically presented from a medium static shot of Elliot looking alternatively at the nudes and Lee, objectivising his voyeurism and, therefore, breaking the previous identification. If earlier we have enjoyed Lee's beauty through Elliot's eyes, now we see Elliot looking at Lee in a way that exposes his desire as ridiculous. The few shot-reverse shots appearing in the film are also used to expose Elliot's ludicrous behaviour. An instance worth mentioning can be seen in the section entitled "God, she is beautiful," where the camera frames Elliot's face immediately after Lee's words: "You're turning all red, Elliot," and the camera reveals his embarrassment.

The general conclusion that can be drawn from the above comments is that, despite the title and the centrality of the female characters, the film creates a male view of women and their relation to men and love. At the same time, the film problematizes that classical Hollywood dichotomy that identifies male with the subject of the look, the seeing, and the female with the object to look at, the being seen, through parody. The film departs from this dichotomy by including both male and female characters as objects to

look at. Nonetheless, this objectification is rendered differently for male and female characters. The parodic distance objectivises the male character as subject of the look and the female one as the object of the look, and of male desire.

Generic conventions always constrain artists' creative process. Previous experience of film viewing and making will unavoidably be inscribed in any artist's works, constituting the "old" aspect that he/she might, or might not, want to subvert or problematise by adding a "new" perspective and meaning. The new perspective is conferred by actuality —an identifying characteristic of comedy. Unlike tragedy, comedy is always a representation addressed to us providing pleasure through the recognition of ideas and objects of our own age (Watts cit. in Corrigan 1981: 116-117). As Potts says (Corrigan 1981: 118), the varying degree of our response to comedy "depends on the eye of the beholder, not on the character of the object he has in view." The immediate response to comedy is perceived as a double pleasure: the pleasure of recognition, and "that of exercising an extremely limited scale of values" (Watts cit. in Corrigan 1981: 117). This process of recognition should not be confused with the process of identification demanded by tragedy (Watts cit. in Corrigan 1981: 117). According to Watts, we recognise something 'as part of [our] experience, *but not an immediate part* "[2] (Corrigan 1981: 117). Thus, a distance between the "beholder" and the "beheld" must necessarily be present in comedy. Besides cinematographic devices to create, paradoxically, identification and its disruption, Allen uses irony and humour to produce comic distance. The ironic distance is created by the frequent use of the interior monologue, which often functions as a device to reveal the disjunction between people's thoughts and their actions, "between what they say and what they mean" (Bragg 1988: 48). An instance of this disjunction can be seen in the section entitled "Dusty just bought this huge house in Southampton," in which the artificiality of the polite small talk between Elliot and Lee contrasts with the impulsiveness of Elliot's inner passion. A similar resource was previously used in *Annie Hall* (1977), in which the small talk between Annie (Diane Keaton) and Alvy (Woody Allen) veils their real thoughts —this time presented to the viewer in the form of subtitles. Elliot's inner voice advises him to act cautiously, but his behaviour results in an impulsive, clumsy kiss that takes Lee completely by surprise. The textual situation makes the whole dramatic moment appear as comic and ridiculous.

The film contains the dramatic elements that comedy shares with tragedy (Corrigan 1981: 11), but, unlike tragedy, they are presented in a distanced manner. Mickey's infertility and its further consequences in his marriage, his search for the meaning of life and God, and his suicide attempt are narrated from a past perspective, some time after they have occurred. As Lester (Alan Alda) puts it in Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), "comedy is tragedy plus time."[3] This temporal perspective makes the tragic situations seem comical; a perception supported by jokes, ironic comments, and the hero's absurd luck —a parody of the logical luck the fool enjoys in the comic world. As Corrigan (1981: 9) puts it, "though a kind of logical luck, which does not seem like luck while we experience the play in performance, the fool assures us that somehow our freakishly individual fortune is capable of triumphing over our tragic fate." Mickey's attempt to kill himself, the uncontrolled shot and the explanation of his escape from death due to his excess of perspiration point paradoxically to that logical luck of the comic conventions. Luck is also thematised in the film as an important element in individual fate and happiness; the element uncontrollable by reason, intelligence or logic.

Allen, in the role of Mickey, is also the comic jester of his previous films, although this time the jokes have a tension-releasing function during the most tragic moments in the film. When Mickey confirms to Dr. Abel that he is having buzzings and ringings, the latter asks "Just in one ear?" and Mickey replies "Yes, well, ah, is it healthier to have them in both ears?"; a joke based on linguistic awareness of the use of the word "just" —a linguistic ambiguity that constitutes a recurrent device in Allen's humour. However, the humorous tone of the film is achieved more by the use of irony, and the characters' embarrassing situations than by the extensive use of jokes as is the case in his earlier films.

Despite McCann's claims that "comedy . . . allows Allen, and ourselves, to suspend moral and social judgement and to entertain imaginative possibilities that a more 'serious' stance toward a character or event would preclude" (McCann 1990: 247), I believe that the film does bear a "serious" social significance concerning gender and the relation between the sexes. Regarding these issues, Allen has been described as "a barometer of the times, independently measuring the changes in attitudes towards relations between the sexes . . ." (Babington and Evans 1989: 152). Thus, the next part of the analysis will deal with the female characters and their relationship with the male ones. As the film transcends its textual limits through references and

allusions to other films, the analysis will incorporate the film's relation to these other texts, namely Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander* (1982), and the film's contribution to the star system, that is, the development of Allen's persona and the ironic incorporation of Maureen O'Sullivan and Lloyd Nolan.

Lee, as has been mentioned above, is the first female character presented as the object of desire for the voyeuristic gaze of Elliot and the spectator. From the early scenes in the first Thanksgiving Day party, we learn that her sisters, Holly and Hannah, disapprove of her relationship with Frederick: "a depressive person." The lack of communication between Lee and Frederick and the latter's unsocial character are visually confirmed by his blurred introduction behind a thick, transparent plastic curtain —the object representing a stumbling block in their relationship— and by Frederick's curt "no" answer to Lee's offer of tea or coffee. To Lee's complaint about his unsocial behaviour, Frederick replies "Lee, you are the only person I can be with or I really look forward to being with" while she passively lets herself be embraced by him. Lee's silence to the question "Isn't it enough that I can love you?" obviously suggests that it is not enough. Frederick's words —"There was a time when you were very happy to be only with me and you wanted to learn anything about poetry, music. Have I really taught you everything I had to give you? I don't think so"— clearly expresses the paternalistic attitude towards her, setting himself as Lee's guide and teacher in the world of art. This relationship that has proved to be satisfactory for a few years is now felt as suffocating by Lee. Paradoxically, when Lee announces that she is leaving him, he realises how dependent he is on her, as she is his only link with the chaotic world from which he seeks refuge in his orderly world of art, and his perfect model of beauty, as can be appreciated in the nudes. The close-up framing of Lee emphasising her beautiful face, her adolescent look (long curly hair, jeans and jumpers, and so on), her fixation with the father figure and her being still a student (although not a very convinced one) construct her as very similar character to Tracy (Mariel Hemingway) in *Manhattan* (1979). Although not so virginal, she, too, does not seem to be "corrupted" in the least by the post-feminist ideology of the New Woman.

Frederick is a character type that is usually present in plays of the Angry Young Men: a man making harsh criticisms on contemporary culture from a position of impotence. He mainly criticises the culture that uses art as a commodity, "I don't sell my work by the yard," he claims, reminding us of the character played by Allen in *Stardust Memories* (1980), Sandy Bates. In addition to this association, McCann (1990: 237-8) mentions Frederick's

comments on a television programme on Auschwitz as a further connexion with Allen, thus reinforcing his claim that Frederick's character constitutes one of the aspects of Allen's personality, as has been mentioned above. The characterization of Frederick, so easily identifiable with the feeling of "angst" in Bergman's works, is perceived much more as a stock type —a mask— than a real character.

Lee's relationship with Elliot will not mean any change. He is still the father figure represented by Frederick —both are much older than her. As in *Manhattan* (1979), the cultural myth of age similarity is emphasized as an important factor in "natural" love relationships. Their age and paternalistic attitude place both Elliot and Frederick in the same narrative position in relation to Lee, and both are presented as her inappropriate love partners.The shot of the print of a female nude in the book-shop insists on the idea of Lee as a model of beauty that will later be reinforced in a scene at Frederick's loft in "Dusty just bought this huge house in Southampton." Like Frederick, Elliot uses art to conquer her. This rivalry felt by Elliot is quite explicit at the bookshop: when Lee mentions that she and Frederick have been at the M.E.T. to see an exhibition of Caravaggio —a painter whose works apparently Elliot does not know— Elliot immediately responds with a reference to e.e. cummings. At the visual level, the scene at the bookshop forewarns difficulties in their relationship that very closely resemble those of Lee and Frederick; only this time the bookshelves —and not a plastic curtain— are presented as stumbling blocks. In the mise-en-scene of the first encounter in the hotel room, Lee is lying naked and covered by bed-clothes and Elliot is sitting on the bed covered with a gown. Their position in relation to each other underlines the protector-protégé (father-daughter) relationship that their dialogue verbalises: he wants to do things for her, to protect her — something that he cannot do with his self-sufficient wife, Hannah. Finally, Lee manages to gain self-confidence and finds the right partner to fulfil her desires: to marry and have children "before it's too late," as she confesses to Frederick. Although Lee's relationship with her husband, Doug (Ivan Kronenfeld), is not narratively developed, the film leads us to assume that she is happy and that his younger age does not fit him into the father figure of her previous relationships, although, ironically, he is a university teacher.

Elliot is split between the quiet life with and love of Hannah, his wife, and the passionate love he feels for Lee, his wife's sister. Elliot explicitly admits that he first fell in love with Hannah because she was the right woman to bring order into his chaotic life. Even the spelling of the name "Hannah" suggests symmetry and perfect balance. Elliot obviously does not want to

renounce either of them, but the situation produces in him a painful anxiety that makes him seek the help of a psycho-analyst. This masculine split of desires for women —the ancient, but still prevalent, division between the mother and the whore— bears an analogy to Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in the character of Nora's husband. However, the latter overcomes the dramatic suffering through daydreaming. Torvald Helmer's physical desires for his wife —not approved of by the society of the time— are aroused in the fancy-dress party by imagining her as his mistress with whom he has a secret love affair (Ibsen 1989). Elliot epitomizes —to borrow Babington and Evans' phrase (1989: 157)— the "prisoners of discourse" of male sexuality still present in contemporary society.

Holly, the other sister, is a nervous character trying to overcome a long succession of failures both in her personal relationships and her career as an actress. She progresses from complete disorientation to success as a writer. The way she dresses is a clear sign of her obsession to succeed in art, to be different —an artist. This self-pressure makes her reject non-artist men —"losers" as she calls them— and be fascinated with David (Sam Waterston), an architect. Her outward appearance and drug addiction identify her with the negative aspects of a modern, liberated woman, without a real personality, adopting roles culturally accepted by the arty coteries in New York. Her external image (shorter hair style, baggy trousers and extravagant hats) and gesticulation resemble those of Annie (Diane Keaton) in *Annie Hall*. Both female characters are constructed as neurotic, lacking self-confidence, self-questioning and slightly 'masculinised'. Without reaching the negative aspects of Allen's extreme feminist characterization like the one performed by Meryl Streep in *Manhattan,* Holly shares some of the characteristics of the New Woman at the beginning of the film. However, that too will prove to be a mask as she warns the viewer in her singing of "I'm Old Fashioned" in the section entitled "The Audition." The song functions as an unmasking gesture: "This year's fancies/ Are passing fancies . . . But sighing sighs / Holding hands / This my heart / Understands / I'm old fashioned / And I don't mind it / It's how I want to be / As long as you agree / To stay old fashioned with me."

As a disoriented character, Holly resembles Mickey, her mirror image in the film. Despite their disastrous first date, "like the Nuremberg trials," where they seem to have incompatible tastes in music and in having fun, they finally overcome this lack of communication. In the scene at the record shop, where they just run into each other, the acting is more natural, contrasting with the contrived acting style that pervades the whole film. Ironically, when they arrange to meet again, they are behind a sign that says "jazz." Holly seems to

have evolved from punk music to opera, and from that to jazz, running parallel to her successive lovers' tastes.[4]

Hannah proves to be, rather than the heroine of the film, the bench mark used as a necessary reference for the other characters: she is Mickey's ex-wife, Elliot's present wife, and Holly and Lee's sister. Her function as a focal point is visually established in the first section. At the first Thanksgiving, in a long fixed shot of the dining-room with everybody at the table, we can see Hannah occupying the vertex of the two lines formed by the people at the table. She is also everybody's centre of attention when her father toasts to her success in the role of Nora, in *A Doll's House*. Her speech reveals her ideas, which identify her as a traditional female character:

> Hannah: "I'm very lucky. When I had the kids I decided to stop working and just, you know, devote myself to having a family, and I'm very, very, very happy, BUT ... I secretly hoped that maybe some day a little gentleman would come along and take me back to the stage just for a second. So I've got that out of my system so I can get back to the thing that really makes me happy."

Hannah is the "talented daughter" for her parents, the ideal woman for Lee, the successful actress and lavish sister for Holly, the charming ex-wife for Mickey and "a wonderful woman" for Elliot. Lee is afraid of being a less passionate lover than her sister with Elliot. Holly resents Hannah's comments on her career prospects, taken as a lack of confidence in Holly's artistic talents: singing, acting, or writing. Elliot's joke on Holly's cooking ability, "That's where your talent lies," ironically expresses what Holly believes to be the general opinion about her artistic talents. It is quite likely that Elliot is expressing Hannah's opinions as he says "I'm her husband. She tells me anything." However, through Holly's script Hannah discovers she is seen by her sisters, parents, and husband as a model of perfection, shielded from life's events. The critical moment of self-discovery for Hannah takes place during the second Thanksgiving when Elliot confirms her identification with the character in Holly's script. In the middle of a tense argument Hannah says "I have needs," to which Elliot answers "I can't see them, and neither can Lee or Holly." Hannah discovers how the others really see her; she is "disgustingly perfect . . . competent . . . giving . . . too self-sufficient." When Hannah admits to not being as self-sufficient as she seemed to be by verbalising her loneliness, she recovers her loving husband again. As she and Elliot lie in bed in the dark, she says "It seems so dark tonight. I feel so alone." And the quick

caballero, as if waiting for a public confession of his wife's limitations, immediately responds by taking her in his arms and saying "You're not alone." This astonishingly rapid reconciliation after a blackout could be interpreted as the subjection of humanity to time; time will solve and even destroy everything. Allen seems to remind us that we are ephemeral and this condition belittles our despairs and joys and also that this is film art where everything is possible: the plausible and the bizarre. By "removing" her mask, Hannah seems to evolve from self-sufficiency towards the liberal concept of "humanity." The New Woman seems to be more tolerable when she shows her weaknesses. Thus, Hannah and Elliot's rapid reconciliation can also be interpreted as a comment on Hollywood's reinforcement of the myth of romance "as a process whereby companionship is defined by the 'natural' domination of men over women."[5]

In the character of Mickey, Allen presents one of his familiar alter-egos. As in previous films, the Allen character is still questioning key metaphysical mysteries such as the existence of God, the meaning of life, mortality, the purpose of human evil and the ability of any religion to provide answers to these questions. Overwhelmed by the lack of answers and by his own life's events, Mickey will also find solace in a work of art: the Marx Brothers' *Duck Soup*. In desperate mood, Mickey enters and sits in a cinema, as he narrates to Holly; a flashback and voice-over reconstruct the insight provided by the viewing of the film:

> 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 real 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 part of the experience? You know, what the hell, it . . . it's not all a drag. And I'm thinking of myself, geez, I should stop ruining my life searching for answers I'm never gonna get, and just *enjoy* it while it lasts . . . And . . . after, who knows? I mean, maybe there is something. Nobody really knows. I know, I know 'maybe' is a very slim reed to hang your whole life on, but that's the best we have...

The tone of this speech resembles that of Gustav Adolf Ekdahl in the Christening celebration scene at the end of *Fanny and Alexander* (1982). The members of the Ekdahl family do not try to answer the "big" questions of life because they are not prepared for that; they just want to enjoy life while they are happy, being aware that the world's malice, death and sorrows are always there as a constant menace. The key question is to learn how to find pleasure in the microcosm we inhabit: in good food, kind smiles, fruit trees in bloom... in the tangible realities of this world. Artists, the world of actors and actresses, will always be necessary to provide us with a thrill of a different life. Allen's moment of anagnorisis seems to discover this same view of life. Both films, *Fanny and Alexander* and *Hannah and Her Sisters,* uphold the idea that theatre and film art have the capacity to alter reality through imagination by constructing a fictional world that both imitates and departs from the non-fictional reality. This view of happiness in life, and art's contribution to it, is also explicitly expressed in *Manhattan* (1979). In a moment of anagnorisis, Allen's character, Isaac, lying down on a couch and speaking into a tape-recorder, tries to give a list of little things that make life worth living.

The same idea about film art is explicitly supported in the film through Holly's script, which seems to coincide with what we have just seen. We are not clearly told to what extent the fictional work within the fiction resembles the "reality" of the fictional world we are seeing, but the hinted similarities suggest the unavoidable interconnexion between real life and fiction. This life-fiction interconnexion is also reinforced through both the intertextual relation to *Fanny and Alexander* and Allen's use of the star system —which includes him in the tradition of 'sincerity and authenticity' that prevailed in post-war America (Babington and Evans 1989: 159). The interaction between his personality and the characters he has played has contructed a persona; Woody Allen as a star. As Morin puts it:

> The actor does not engulf his role. The role does not engulf the actor. Once the film is over, the actor becomes an actor again, the character remains a character, *but from their union is born a composite creature who participates in both, envelops them both: the star*. (Morin 1961: 39).

Thus, the role played by Allen in *Hannah and Her Sisters* immediately directs viewers to his previous performances, indicating the evolution of Allen's persona. Although Mickey's failure with Hannah due to his infertility

reminds us of Allen the loser in his early films, he finally succeeds in love. But his new worries are whether he can commit himself to anyone and love's ephemeral nature. As Mickey remarks "The heart is a very, very resilient little muscle." He epitomises the neurotic male whose masculine identity is in crisis —a personal drama in which women play a central role. Redefinitions of gender roles seem to be under way.

Shifts in conceptions concerning gender roles are underlined in another instance of stardom in the film: the presence of Maureen O'Sullivan, Hannah/Mia Farrow's mother in fiction and real life. Both her presence and Lloyd Nolan's are used not only to comment ironically on the ephemeral nature of human beings and, in turn, on the star system itself, but also on marriage and sex. Her fictional name, "Norma," establishes an intertextual relationship with Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard,* in which Norma Desmond/Gloria Swanson also plays the role of an aging star. The old photographs on the wall and shelves and dialogue identify Norma with the myths of Hollywood glamour, pointing to an anachronized artificiality which contrasts with the aura of authenticity associated with Allen's persona. As Virginia Wright Wexman puts it,

> The figure of the aging star lends itself especially well to a Hollywood-style exposé of beauty because it allows an emergent discourse (the power of women represented by the female star) to be depicted as a residual discourse (the anachronized "constructedness" of the mature actress's appearance and style). (1993: 148)

Maureen O'Sullivan's former persona is deglamourized, becoming an image of decay that resists old age —beauty and youth are the star's main assets. This actress is well known in Hollywood for her staunch Catholicism, which reinforces the irony in her new role as an alcoholic who flirts around with much younger men and who calls Othello, the Shakespearean character, "a black stallion." This excess associated with the figure of the female star pinpoints to a related anxiety about gender relations (Wexman 1993: 150). In her resentful attacks against her husband, Norma expresses past conventions of marriage —a good husband should support his family— and her husband's anxiety about his masculinity that her excess provokes.

Concerning women, Allen usually represents the equivocal and negative visions of the New Woman in minor characters like "subsidiary girl friends, friends' lovers and so on" (Babington and Evans 1989: 169). To a certain extent, April, Holly's friend, conveys these negative aspects of the New

Woman. She openly tells Holly that she has accepted an invitation to the opera from David, overtly admitting her attraction to the architect —a feeling that Holly detected and privately confessed to herself in an interior monologue after a tour around David's favourite buildings in New York. April does not mind sharing David with Holly, whereas for Holly this is the end of their friendship. For Hannah too, the worst thing she can think of to explain Elliot's strange mood with her is that "he's been seeing another woman." In this film female characters have the function of reinforcing the cultural myth of exclusive love that produces Elliot's anxiety, creating an outstanding difference and contrast with the female world depicted in Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*. The extraordinary microcosm of the familial world in the latter is ruled by the powerful complicity of the female characters who support one another against the rigid social norms established by patriarchy. In the past depicted by Bergman's film, the notion of the male and the female microcosms as two separate spheres was closely associated with the patriarchal model of marriage. This model understands marriage as an economic rather than an erotic union, where the woman's role is to produce heirs and the man's role is to protect the family (Wexman 1993: 75-89). The women in *Fanny and Alexander* are conscious of the conflicting tensions created by the patriarchal split between marriage and romantic love at the time, which they resist through mutual support and complicity.

The two films and Ibsen's *A Doll's House* deal with two particular aspects concerning the issue of truth. One aspect is concerned with sincerity between husband and wife and the other is concerned with the relationship between imagination and truth, or between fiction and reality. Both *Hannah and Her Sisters* and *A Doll's House* reflect the dilemma on being sincere with your love partner: although telling the truth is regarded as a gesture of honesty denoting confidence and complicity with the other, this gesture can inflict a pain much too hard to bear when the truth disrupts social conventions on relationships, so inherent in ourselves. Elliot and Lee opt for not telling the truth as if they could anticipate Hannah's reaction and the dramatic consequences of doing so. If in *A Doll's House,* social conventions of love relationships are critically presented as too strict and unfair, *Hannah and Her Sisters* seems to suggest that these conventions are so deeply rooted in ourselves that they become the real rulers of our reactions and behaviour. In this respect, the little world depicted in *Fanny and Alexander* is much more liberal and tolerant, marking a significant contrast with the "greater world."

The other aspect of the issue of truth dealt with in these texts alludes to the blurred boundary between imagination and reality, or between lie and truth. Alexander's imaginative vision of reality, in *Fanny and Alexander*, is condemned and taken as lies, whereas when these same visions are put on stage or on screen, the lies are seen as art. The impossibility of discerning between truth and lie is stated by Helena in the last scene of the film, where she claims that everything is both plausible and bizarre. Out of spaceless and timeless unrealities, the imagination creates new images, in a mixture of memories, of events, of free inventions . . . "Bizarre" is the term that best defines the ending of *Hannah and Her Sisters*. All the characters have congregated in Hannah's flat to celebrate Thanksgiving day and "You Made Me Love You" can be heard on the sound-track. Hannah and Elliot are reconciled, Lee is happily talking with her new partner, and Mickey puts his arms around Holly's shoulders and kisses her in front of a mirror, which reflects their images with a tenuous light:

> It'd make a great story, I think. A guy marries one sister... [he kisses her]... doesn't work out [kisses her again] many years later ... [another kiss] he winds up... married to the other sister. It's, you know, it's a... I don't know how you're gonna top that.

To which Holly responds very softly, "Mickey . . . I'm pregnant." Mickey is first shocked, and then, he embraces her again. Mickey's reaction to the 'magical' pregnancy is the sign of acceptance that everything is possible; love overcomes neurotic infertility. This happy ending fits within the generic conventions of comedy, demanding the audience's sympathy with this final attitude towards love, as if stating "this should be" (Frye in Corrigan 1981: 87). As Frye puts it,

> Happy endings do not impress us as true, but as desirable, and they are brought about by manipulation. The watcher of death and tragedy has nothing to do but sit and wait for the inevitable end; but something gets born at the end of comedy, and the watcher of birth is a member of a busy society. (In Corrigan 1981: 89)

What is desirable is the familiar Hollywood film formula of romantic love that reconciles the contradiction inherent in the companionate couple, traditionally resolved by means of the conventional kiss representing wedding or its promise. Luhmann has pointed out the contradictory nature of the companionate couple which has romantic love —considered as an intense

passion of short-lived nature— as the basis for the lifelong monogamous marriage (Wexman 1993: 8).

Despite the convenience of the 'magical' pregnancy for the adjustment to the happy ending convention of comedies, the film insists a little too much on the importance of motherhood for women, thereby emphazising the idea of the attachment of women's fate to their bodies. Helena, Fanny and Alexander's grandmother, also admits, like Hannah, that she prefers being a mother to being an actress, although she enjoyed both. Lee, as has been mentioned above, also expresses her desire to have children as a primary one. The three sisters manage to incorporate into social life with a varying degree of difficulty and even to succeed in their careers. Hannah is a successful actress, Holly writes good scripts, and Lee, a former alcoholic, becomes a university student. Although the three of them are interested in finding their professional occupation, none of them questions motherhood, which appears as a natural and crucial aim in their lives. The association of women with motherhood as something natural has been constantly reinforced by patriarchy, and questioned by feminists since the early years of this movement. These three women, albeit intellectual and interested in social issues, represent traditional women characterised by an uncomplicated sexuality and a main interest in having a home and children. In a post-feminist context, Allen seems to reinforce old values concerning women and sexual love for the creation of the companionate couple.

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The happy ending seems to be possible through a re-discovery of old values in femininity, through women that are ready to be old-fashioned "as long as you agree / To stay old fashioned with me." Despite the order brought out of the chaos, there is still an ambivalence in the film that remains unsolved. It is not easy to decide whether the film ironically criticises those values or whether it considers them as extraordinary as the "magical" pregnancy. Is Allen suggesting that the suitable companionate couple can only be achieved by removing the masks imposed by new fashions and dogmatisms that veil the good old values to be discovered? Or, is he suggesting that the "perfect" combination of old and new values on femininity in women should be that which preserves male dominance, a balance that would require women as both companionable and subservient in order to become suitable romantic partners? Through visual mechanisms the film exposes the traditional male dominance of the gaze in classical cinema,

providing an ironic vision, covertly held from Allen's perspective, of men gazing at women. The relationships that the film narrative develops sustain old values concerning gender roles and love, values that are undermined by comic elements and intertextuality. Through the intertextual tensions pointing to texts that offer a greater resistance to patriarchy, Allen seems to underline the ironic attitude of the text concerning the artificiality of social conventions that constrain our behaviour; however, the strong emphasis on traditional views of romance makes it difficult to decide on the final attitude of the text —ironic or sublime. a

NOTES

1. Joseph von Sternberg, John Ford, Orson Welles among others.

2. Italics in the original.

3. I am indebted to Dr. Celestino Deleyto for this comment.

4. Music plays an important role in this film. It is associated with cultural connotations: classical music is connected to the cultivated community —the architect, painters, teachers and actors—, punk music relates to a fashionable community seen as depersonalized, jazz music is associated with Allen's character —Allen himself plays the clarinet in a jazz group—, and old romantic songs like "Bewitched", "You Made Me Love You", "Isn't It Romantic" or "You Are Too Beautiful" are connected to Hannah's parents' past world. These romantic songs also function as links among the love relationships in the film —Lee and Elliot, Elliot and Hannah, and Mickey and Holly—, denoting the same attachment to past values on love.

5. Wexman 1993: 156. The word "natural" appears in inverted commas in the original.

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