

Woody Allen, Annie Hall (1977)

Major Credits:

Screenplay: Woody Allen and Marshall Brickman
Cinematography: Gordon Willis
Editor: Ralph Rosenblum
Cast: Woody Allen (Alvy Singer), Diane Keaton (Annie)

Background:

The working title for this film was "Anhedonia," meaning the inability to experience pleasure. The final title was derived from Diane Keaton Hall's real name. As every viewer at the time knew, Keaton was Allen's girl friend for several years and they had recently broken up (a parallel here to the working relationships of Allen's favorite director, Ingmar Bergman). Keaton had co-starred with Woody in a number of his previous films and would also subsequently appear in his Interiors and Manhattan.

Cinematic Techniques:

Annie Hall was Woody Allen's most accomplished work to date technically, relying especially on the lush cinematography of Gordon Willis and the skillful editing of Ralph Rosenblum.

1. narrative structure - the story is told through a complex pattern of flashbacks and present action, all framed by the "key jokes" in the monologues at the beginning and end. Maurice Yacowar has also noted how the two sequences in which Annie sings mark crucial turning points when her relationship with Alvy is viewed from her perspective. Thus, the songs nicely balance Alvy's (Woody's) opening and closing jokes.

2. special effects - Allen employs old techniques--subtitles, split screen, animation--in new ways to hold the audience's interest and comment upon the action.

3. comedy - Allen synthesizes a number of comic styles to revitalize what had been for some time a rather dormant American genre: a) verbal wit (Commentary + Dissent = Dysentery), reminiscent of the Marx Brothers; b) sight gags (Alvy's famous sneeze), reminiscent of Chaplin and Keaton; c) satire (Los Angeles sequences), reminiscent of Sixties' comedies like The Loved One and Dr. Strangelove.

Questions for Discussion:

1. The explicit theme of Annie Hall seems to be "Love fades." And the central problem of interpretation, posed by Alvy in the opening monologue, is "Where did the screw-up come?"

2. Rather remarkably, the film presents subjective portraits of three major centers of American cultural values: New York, Los Angeles, and the Midwest (represented by Chippewa Falls, WI). What is the director's attitude toward each of these regions?

3. Many critics have noted how Annie Hall is a contemporary retelling of the Pygmalion myth. How has Allen incorporated, interpreted, and transformed specific elements of this myth (made famous first by G.B. Shaw's play and then by the musical My Fair Lady)?

On Woody Allen:

He has a Prussian discipline. He's the only director I know who finishes a film and then, without any time off, without drinking or drugs or philandering, without celebration, gloating, or self-punishing regrets, goes quietly to work the following day on his next script.

--Ralph Rosenblum

Getting the "References":
50 Literary and Cultural Allusions in *Annie Hall*

Groucho Marx
Freud, "Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious"
George Bernard Shaw ("Those who cannot do, teach.")
Wagner
Johnny Carson
Robert Redford
The Godfather
Ingmar Bergman (*Face to Face*)
Marcel Ophuls (*The Sorrow and the Pity*)
Fellini (*La Strada*)
Samuel Beckett ("... he doesn't hit me on a gut level")
Henry James (*The Turn of the Screw*)
Marshall McLuhan
Maurice Chevalier
Bloomingdale's
"ADLAI"
Ben Shahn
Oswald
Earl Warren
J. Edgar Hoover
Paul Goodman
Commentary and *Dissent*
The Manson family
Dick and Perry
Oswald in *Ghosts*
Norman Rockwell
Sylvia Plath
Balzac ("There goes another novel.")
Truman Capote
Billie Holiday
David and Bathsheba
Frank Sinatra
Dylan
Alice Cooper
Kafka ("sex with you is really a Kafkaesque experience")
Leopold and Loeb
William F. Buckley, *National Review*
Jack and Anjelica
Hugh Hefner
Masters and Johnson
Uri Geller
Nelson Eddy
Legs Diamond

Charlie Chaplin (“...right before his un-American thing.”)

Grand Illusion

Catcher in the Rye

Kissinger

Medea

Death in Venice

Adolph Hitler