

YOU KNOW NOTHING OF MY WORK: READING AND MISREADING

WOODY ALLEN AND PHILIP ROTH

THESIS

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## I. INTRODUCTION

“I assure you that Arafat can tell the difference between Woody Allen and Philip Roth.”

—Philip Roth, *Operation Shylock*

The improbable sentence above prompts Philip Roth (the character) in Philip Roth’s (the author’s) novel *Operation Shylock*, to muse, “This was surely the strangest sentence I had ever heard spoken in my life” (155). Though it is probably true that Yasser Arafat could distinguish easily enough novelist from filmmaker (Roth is taller), casual readers and spectators might find the task more difficult than they would imagine. Granted, the film is probably Allen’s and the book Roth’s, but despite the different mediums, Roth and Allen have led strangely parallel careers, returning again and again to shared characters, plots, and themes. Researching texts that had, ostensibly, nothing to do with either Roth or Allen, I was astonished by the abundance of casual linkages between the two on seemingly random topics from the recurrence of the “Jewish-Queer” character (Freedman 273) to the writings of Erica Jong’s grandfather (Jong). What cemented my curiosity, however, was the mysterious phrase, “from Philip Roth to Woody Allen” (Schneider 44; Rosenberg 147; Ravits 11), and the equally prevalent, “from Woody Allen to Philip Roth” (Goffman 81; Barreca 11; Langer; Bresnick) that connote both polar opposition and interconnected semblance. But despite these constant connections, few critics have stopped to dwell on the works of Allen and Roth together in a prolonged, thoughtful way.

*Slate* contributor Alex Abramovich calls Roth and Allen “estranged twins” who were “separated at birth,” and Chuck Klosterman categorizes the pair as “arch rivals,” saying, “Mia Farrow is Woody Allen’s nemesis, but if Woody had only one bullet in his revolver, he’d shoot Phillip [sic] Roth” (245). Religious blogger Tamar Fox, echoing decades’ worth of Jewish moralizers and *Commentary* columnists, writes that they are two “paragons of self-hatred” and “the kind of guys who I bet never graced the inside of a sukkah.” Roth’s second wife, Claire Bloom, has acted in roles created by both men, and Allen’s longtime girlfriend Mia Farrow has been romantically involved with each man. Incidentally, both women have searing tell-all memoirs in which the driving force behind book sales were their respective break ups. Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint* makes a cameo appearance in one of Allen’s early stories and Roth, in turn, criticizes Allen’s views on Israel in *Operation Shylock*. Also, consider the two enormous mammary glands that appeared out of nowhere in 1972—one in Roth’s Kafkaesque nightmare *The Breast* and the other in Allen’s film anthology *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex \* But Were Afraid to Ask*. My research has turned up no evidence of even one gigantic breast in the humanities before or since the notorious pair. These diverse echoes are partly explained by their closely related biographies and the cultures they grew up in, which can be gleaned from interviews and reflections in their work.

Roth and Allen were born a scant two years and ten miles apart—Roth in 1933 Newark and Allen in 1935 Brooklyn—and reared by second-generation Jewish parents through the Great Depression and World War II. They both began working seriously on their crafts in their early twenties and, by the end of the 1950s, had attained a level of critical success with the publication of Roth’s collection of stories *Goodbye Columbus*

and Allen's work writing for television stars like Ed Sullivan and Sid Caesar. In 1969, the two scored their first commercial hits, *Take the Money and Run* and *Portnoy's Complaint*, which would allow them to continue working with relative autonomy throughout most of their careers. These careers are marked by an abundant prolificacy rivaled chiefly by one another with. Upon the commencement of this project, Roth's has published 31 books and Allen has written and directed 41 films, averaging out to approximately one movie a year and about one book every other year for Allen and Roth respectively.

For all these similarities, what most unite Allen and Roth are the critical stigmas they have collected in common over the years. Their names have been inextricably linked with the term "self-hating Jew." Their preoccupation with masculinity while eschewing or caricaturing female characters has run them afoul of feminists. Their tendency to write themselves into their work and strip mine their autobiography has prompted critics and confidantes to label them narcissists, solipsists, and betrayers of trust. These three broad charges, along with several others, will be taken up in the following chapters from three perspectives. The first and most important perspective for this work is that of the critic and the scholar. Neither man has a spotless track record of critical reception, and many of my sources will include contemporary and retrospective film and book reviews along with academic articles, books, and documentaries. The second angle is popular success and failure. *Portnoy's Complaint* and *Manhattan* represent the pinnacle of each artist's commercial success, but they have also released works that have lost money and alienated fans. Box office scores, bestseller charts, and paraliterary/paracinematic media like advertisements and cover designs will constitute a portion of these sections. The final

perspective incorporated in the coming chapters is the artistic other, or one another—Allen to Roth and Roth to Allen. Though both men are often branded by the same caustic claims, each interprets his own work to be wrongfully accused and the other's to be guilty as charged. This rivalry was compounded and dramatized by an unlikely biographical intersection that led Allen to base the most despicable character he ever played in the most vulgar film he ever created on Philip Roth and Roth to oversee (and perhaps creatively contribute to) Mia Farrow's memoir *What Falls Away*.

Though he is known primarily as a film director and actor, I will be referring to Woody Allen as a writer, partly as a convenient way to group him with Roth, but also because he only directs his own screenplays and has stated that he thinks of himself as a writer first and a director second (and an actor not at all). In addition to screenplays, Allen has written short pieces for *The New Yorker*, *Playboy*, and other magazines that have been collected into four volumes: *Getting Even*, *Without Feathers*, *Side Effects*, and *Mere Anarchy*. He even wrote what he says might be considered a novel but abandoned the project when Roger Angell of *The New Yorker* and Vincent Canby of *The New York Times* read it privately without enthusiasm (Lax 105). Roth has similarly crossed over into film by writing screenplays for his novels *The Ghost Writer* and *The Prague Orgy* while other stories and novels became the source of the films *Goodbye Columbus*, *Portnoy's Complaint*, *The Human Stain*, and *Elegy (The Dying Animal)*, with adaptations of *American Pastoral*, *Indignation*, and *The Humbling* in various stages of production. One of Roth's earliest short stories was even used as source material to an often forgotten 1960 episode of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*.



Each critical reading or misreading will receive its own chapter and progress in a way that begins with the broad and moves toward the specific. The first claim I take up will be the feminist critique that Allen and Roth, or at least their characters, are misogynists evident from their representation of female characters within their work and real-life treatment of women outside of it. Next, I will explore the assertion that the writers are self-hating Jews with no regard for the sanctity of Judaism or the safety of the Jewish people. In addition to the well-covered ground of Jewish identity in Allen and Roth, I will analyze the historical and political representations of the Holocaust, Israel, and anti-Semitism. Finally, I will turn to the thin line between autobiography and fiction using the self-reflexive works *Zuckerman Unbound* and *Stardust Memories* to identify the distinctive levels of stardom (what Roth calls the unintended consequences of art) the two writers have garnered and their fictional response to it.

Before presenting these criticisms I will begin with a broader analysis of the two key texts that can provide insight into them: *Annie Hall* and *Portnoy's Complaint*. Not only do these sibling texts represent highpoints of intersecting artistic and financial success, but they are also emblematic of what Roth hates about Allen and Allen, Roth. I will look specifically at plotting strategies and the influence of Freudian psychoanalysis within the works and use this understanding as a springboard into the later chapters. Finally, the comparison will provide what *Annie Hall's* Alvy Singer would call the Central Joke of this project and what Alexander Portnoy would call the Punch Line: What do two self-hating Jews hate more than themselves?

#### PUNCH LINE

Each other.

## II. STRUCTURE AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

Popularity is not always an indication of quality, both in the broader culture and within a single artist's body of work. *Moby Dick* failed to sell its initial 3,000-copy run, and films about wizards and vampires consistently outdraw those intelligently representing reality. Critical acclaim is only a slightly better gauge of quality as truly groundbreaking work tends to be denigrated by evaluators tethered to a contemporary, and thus temporary, ideology. According to modern sensibilities, the Academy of Motion Pictures and the various literary prize committees often get it "wrong" when assessing the finest work of any given year. In the cases of Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* and Woody Allen's *Annie Hall*, however, the intersecting critical and commercial acclaim has lasted and proved to be a good indicator that these works are remembered as accurate reflections of the cultures that facilitated them and some of the best writing from two of the best comic artists of their era.

*Portnoy's Complaint* was written between 1967 when Roth's previous book, *When She Was Good*, was released to a chorus of disappointed reviewers and *Portnoy's* eventual publication in 1969, but as Roth says, the "ideas that went into the book have been in my mind ever since I began writing" ("Roth's" 35). Even before publishing *When She Was Good*, he was writing stories and fragmental experiments based on his childhood in two competing voices—that of the "nice Jewish boy," striving to please and impress, and the "Jewboy," with a voice that was "blasphemous, mean, bizarre, scatological [and] spirited" (*Reading* 36). When he was finally able to synthesize the two voices into the

perpetual energy of Alexander Portnoy, the novel came in a quick “spurt of concentrated energy” that “helped give it that tone” of a spontaneous rant (Cooper 94).

Allen approached *Annie Hall* in the same spirit of reinvention and experimentation less than ten years later. His previous works (with the exception of *Play it Again Sam*, written for the stage) had all been set in farcical landscapes with unrealistic situations. While making *Annie Hall*, however, he told the press that he was trying to make “a much more realistic, contemporary story. It’s a comedy and for laughs. But it takes place in New York, now. It’s not a costume or surrealistic kind of story—it’s more romantic and more understandable” (“Conversation” 12). It is difficult to imagine, but Allen went nearly a decade without directing a film with the majority of the narrative is set in New York City. He approached the project, as Roth did *Portnoy*, with multiple strategies and perspectives, which led to the unique narrative technique. His original vision was to treat the relationship between Annie and Alvy with the same stream-of-consciousness narration as Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* with one imagined scene suggesting the next in free association, but before long, this plan resulted in out of control production costs and an initial cut an hour longer than the hour and a half conventional comedy. It was the intensive editing sessions with Allen and his collaborator Ralph Rosenblum that resulted in the final 93-minute film. Rosenblum recalled that the idea of *Annie Hall* winning a single award to him seemed crazy when he first saw the uncut footage. It was, at that time, “an untitled and chaotic collection of bits and pieces that seemed to defy continuity, bewilder its creators, and, of all Allen’s films, hold the least promise for popular success” (273).

Upon release, both projects were wildly successful, grossing much more than other “serious” works with seemingly limited audience appeal and managed to stir critical debate and discussion. *Annie Hall* received near universally positive reviews, and the reviews of *Portnoy’s Complaint* were at least universally passionate. *Annie Hall* made over 19 million dollars in revenue in its first year and went on to make considerably more after receiving the Academy Awards for Best Original Screenplay, Best Director, Best Actress, and Best Picture (“Database”). *Portnoy*, because of its polarizing controversy and the formidable competing releases by Kurt Vonnegut, Jerzy Kosinski, and other important post-war authors, did not win any major literary prizes, but it is retrospectively recognized as one of the most important works of the 1960s, selling over 275,000 copies in its first two days of publication and approaching 4 million by 1975 (Peeples).

The basic premise of the two works is the same: a painful breakup prompts the protagonist to reevaluate his life and puzzle out how he got there. For Alvy Singer, Allen’s character, the best therapy is art. He writes a play based on his relationship and performs the comic monologue that is the film. For Alexander Portnoy, the best therapy is therapy. Though Doctor Spielvogel is ever-present, he remains silent either by choice or by force of Alex’s steady monologue. Alex is, like Alvy, practically alone and forced to practice self-analysis. One of the most obvious dissimilarities between the book and film is that while Allen only takes an in-depth look at one relationship, Roth’s scope is considerably wider, encompassing several romantic and familial relationships. This is, however, not because Allen is being comparatively simplistic, but it is due, rather, to the difference in mediums. Ron Silver takes eight and a half hours to read the audio book version, and this length allows Roth to explore more of Alex’s life. In fact, the film

version of *Portnoy* cuts out all of Alex's girlfriends except for The Monkey and has to invent shortcut situations to give the film any sort of internal coherence or resemblance to the novel. The extra footage of the original two and a half hour cut of *Annie Hall* was almost entirely comprised of flashbacks and free associations that tied the past and present: "The thing was supposed to take place in my mind," says Woody. "Something that would happen would remind me of a quick childhood flash, and that would remind me of a surrealistic image . . . None of that worked" (Rosenblum 275). Alvy can be seen as roundly drawn as Alex by extrapolating from the scenes we do get of his first two wives and the early family life in flashbacks and dialogue allusions. For all the similarities between their situations and solutions, the two characters are very different people in how they conduct themselves throughout the therapy. Before analyzing them side-by-side, though, it is important to understand the structure of the two stories they tell.

One striking similarity immediately apparent from the works' openings is the parallel narrative form—Alvy Singer guides the spectator through *Annie Hall* with confessional standup comedy while Portnoy's monologue is a kind of comedic lie-down confession. Both are vehemently first-person narratives to the degree that the reader must bend to the subjective, sometimes absurd, worldview of each protagonist. They act as omniscient narrators of their own lives with hypothetical insights into the thoughts and actions of other characters and invented truths that seem objectively preposterous. Alvy and Alex are the ones, after all, telling the stories, and they may do so however they like. "Please, allow me—" Portnoy tells Dr. Spielvogel, "it's my money" (235).

After the silent opening credits role, *Annie Hall* begins with a close up (a rarity in Allen's directing) of Alvy Singer, a middle-aged joke writer turned stand up and television personality, telling his two important jokes while staring directly into the camera. This two-minute scene immediately splits the viewer between audience member at Alvy's standup routine and individual spectator of Allen's film. This subtle shift in mediums melds the two into a hybrid form, allowing Allen to freely swing from one to the other and address the viewer two-fold. *Portnoy's Complaint* achieves this same reader division from the start by having Alex, a New York City bureaucrat, launch into a conversational anecdote without indicating that Doctor Spielvogel is the silent listener. Alex uses transitional phrases like "of course" and asks rhetorical questions that give the reader the impression that they are the target of Alex's informal speech (4), but in a quick remark, the actual addressee is revealed: "These, Doctor, are the earliest impression I have of my parents" (5). These references to "Doctor" (5), "Doctor Spielvogel" (36), "Your Honor" (102), "Your Holiness" (134), "Doctor Freud" (266), and "Doctor Kronkite" (266) are infrequent and serve as intermittent reminders of the monologue's origin and purpose. Practically, though, Roth is able to alternate between the conventions of his one diagetic relationship (patient to doctor) and the other non-diagetic relationship (writer to reader). This device of formal splitting transforms the two works into a primary and secondary mode of performance: the viewer is watching a standup comedy routine that happens to be a film, and the reader is reading the transcript of a psychotherapy session that happens to be a novel. All information and recollections that Alvy and Alex present must be seen through the filter of these primary situations while keeping the objectives of each in mind.

First and foremost, Alvy is looking for a laugh. Several times throughout the film, he appears working at his day job as a comedian on a talk show, at a college campus, and in a political rally, and the anxious yet upbeat persona he exhibits stands in marked contrast to the actual anxious and depressed character he displays throughout the film. The persona closely resembles that of pre-1977 Woody Allen as a media figure cracking jokes during interviews and mugging for the cameras. Some of the jokes in Alvy's routine are actually lifted verbatim from Allen's own nightclub act of the '60s. However, to take *Annie Hall* just "for laughs" like some of the films that came before it is an obvious error. Though the opening monologue often resembles standup comedy, it certainly appears to act as therapy. After Alvy finishes telling his two important jokes in the opening monologue, he starts a line that sounds like the preamble to a traditional self-effacing standup routine, but he is unable to get to any sort of punch line that would give the anecdote closure and explain it away as just a joke:

You know, lately the strangest things have been going through my mind, 'cause I turned forty, tsch, and I guess I'm going through a life crisis or something, I don't know. I, uh . . . and I'm not worried about aging. I'm not one o' those characters, you know. Although I'm balding slightly on top, that's about the worst you can say about me.

He sounds like an actor who has forgotten his lines or a comedian whose set is going disastrously worse than expected. Here, Alvy reveals himself to be a comedian too bothered by something else to be funny. After a few more rambling lines, he finally gets to the point of why he is so scattered, suddenly saying with a deep sigh, "Annie and I broke up and I—I still can't get my mind around that." It's as if he tells the audience

(both his diageitic standup audience and his non-diageitic patrons of the film) he will not be able to do his act tonight because he has something else on his mind.

Trying to discern the expressed and ulterior motives of Alexander Portnoy is a more difficult task. The therapeutic benefits of laughter and comedy are well documented, so Alvy's intentions are understandable, but at times, Alex seems to have entered therapy simply to have a captive audience. As a well-known and well-connected public figure, there are certainly more inexpensive outlets for his idiosyncratic eccentricities. Alex is sincerely distressed and often acts like he would genuinely like the doctor's opinion, but he seems too anxious to sit still or listen to a voice other than his own. In one passage, Alex begins asking question after question trying to find a moral reason for sleeping with so many women. "Do I exaggerate?" he asks, "Am I doing myself in only as a clever way of showing off? Or boasting perhaps? Do I really experience this restlessness, this horniness, as an affliction—or as an accomplishment? Both? Could be. Or is it only a means of evasion?" (102). He piles on the questions and sets up a bleak marital hypothetical alternative to his womanizing, but then, only a few lines later, he admits, "On the other hand, even I must admit that there is maybe, from a certain perspective, something a little depressing about my situation, too" (102).

On the surface, his initial questions appear to show that he has some desire to change if he finds his behavior to be amoral, but his unwillingness to see his treatment of women as anything more than maybe sometimes, to certain people, a little gloomy seems to indicate that the self-probing questions were, as he suggested, "showing off" and "boasting." As he addresses his analyst, he gives the appearance of a patient seeking answers, but he does so as an actor would—with self-aggrandizing exuberance. He, like



Alvy, also cannot stop himself from playing the comedian and going for a laugh when he is primarily attempting to get psychological help. He tells Spielvogel, “I mean here’s a joke for you, for instance. Three Jews are walking down the street, my mother, my father, and me” (112). He then launches into an anecdote that, while funny, has grave implications because, to Alex, his life is made up of jokes and situations that would be funny if he were not living them: “This is my life, my only life, and I’m living it in the middle of a Jewish joke! I am the son in the Jewish joke—*only it ain’t no joke!*” (36-37). Later, too, he can’t seem to decide whether he is telling a joke or properly beginning his treatment: “Is it the process, Doctor, or is it what we call ‘the material’? [. . .] Is this truth I’m delivering up, or is it just plain *kvetching*? Or is *kvetching* for people like me a *form* of truth?” (94).

Another barrier to these narrative styles is the inability to find objectivity and assurance that the narrator is not just inventing or imagining. *Annie Hall* springs directly from the neurotic mind of Alvy Singer, and, while Alex’s monologue may actually be directed at a fictional therapist, the reader gets nothing but a punch line as an opposing view. Alvy confesses the potential for exaggeration in the same way saying, “My analyst says I exaggerate my childhood memories, but I swear I was brought up underneath the rollercoaster in Coney Island section of Brooklyn. Maybe that accounts for my personality, which is a little nervous, I think.” The viewer has the same dilemma from before: is Alvy being honest or is he trying to get laughs? This question is answered soon after when the film’s reality suddenly has a fantastical slant. A loud professor standing directly behind Annie and Alvy pontificates on Marshall McLuhan before being silenced by the sudden appearance of McLuhan himself from off-screen. Six-year-old classmates

in flashback rise to declare their future occupations, drug addictions, and fetishes. For no reason at all, the protagonists are suddenly animated as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* characters with the Wicked Queen yelling, “I don’t get a period! I’m a cartoon character!” In one telling flashback, young Alvy is seen laughing and running along with soldiers from the army, the navy, and the marines and a Marilyn Monroe type woman clad in a bathing suit. As they approach the camera, the woman bends over to blow a kiss at the camera. Adult Alvy narrates this film in voiceover saying, “You know, I have a hyperactive imagination. My mind tends to jump around a little, and I-I-I-I-I have some trouble between fantasy and reality.” These flights of fancy are remnants of the initial stream-of-consciousness settings interspersed with the actual story of Annie and Alvy’s relationship, and though the scenes call into question the validity of the story events, they illuminate the workings of Alvy’s mind and focalize the film from his distinct perspective.

There are similar unrealistic situations meant to dramatize a subjectively real feeling in *Portnoy*, but Alex has an easier time discerning imagination from life. For instance, after getting sperm in his eye from his experience with an Italian girl named Bubbles, he paints a vivid picture through hypothetical dialogue with his parents. A seeing eye dog leads him home, and he must explain to his parents that he has been blinded by “consorting with Christian girls” (182). “How can he be blind,” his father asks, “He doesn’t even know what it means to turn off a light” (182). Elsewhere he imagines his “little thing” falling off after catching syphilis from Bubbles and has to hide it from his mother under his shoe. He finally breaks down crying, “It’s my own. I caught the syph from an eighteen-year-old Italian girl in Hillside, and now, now, I have no more

p-p-p-penis!” (167). These events are clearly contrived for the entertainment of Spielvogel and himself, but there are moments of ambiguity that Alex insists are really taken from his childhood. For instance, he swears that when he was seven his mother threatened to castrate him if he did not finish his dinner. Sitting down next to him with a bread knife she asks if he wants to be “weak or strong, a success or a failure, a man or a mouse” (16). “Doctor,” Alex says, “*why*, why oh why oh why oh why does a mother pull a knife on her own son? (16). The story is suspect not only because Sophie Portnoy seems an unlikely candidate for filicide, but because the story has slight variations each time Alex tells it: first, she merely “sits down in a chair beside me with a long bread knife in her hand” (16), then she “waves a knife in my direction” (16), and finally she “point[s] a bread knife at my heart” (17). It is hundreds of pages later that Alex finally gives the story the last bit of exaggeration to make it as dramatic as possible: “Who else do you know whose mother actually threatened him with the dreaded knife? Who else was so lucky as to have the threat of castration so straight-forwardly put by his momma?” (257). Yet he claims, “I swear to you, this is not bullshit or a screen memory” (97).

Interestingly, a parallel image appears as the final scene of *Annie Hall*’s opening monologue. Alvy’s mother sits at the dining room table looking directly into the camera and aggressively peeling a phallic carrot with a blade. She nags her adult son (though she does not show any signs of aging from the other flashbacks) for only seeing the worst in people and not getting along with anyone at school: “You were always outta step with the world. Even when you got famous, you still distrusted the world.” Though the two works share this image, it is not necessarily true that Allen is lifting the image from *Portnoy*, as there is a long tradition of employing the stereotype of the castrating Jewish mother, a

character Allen explores most thoroughly in his short film *Oedipus Wrecks* from the omnibus film *New York Stories*.

These psychoanalytic buzzwords and early childhood memories highlight one central question asked by the two works: Can analysis (professional or self) really make the analysand happier or healthier? The question is explored but not answered by Allen and Roth throughout more than these two works. Jeffrey Berman in his book about artistic representation of psychoanalysts writes, “When a Philip Roth character finds himself lying on a couch, more than likely he is engaged not in sex but in psychoanalysis. Therapy becomes the most intimate and imaginative event in life for the beleaguered hero, the one love affair he cannot live without” (11). In *Letting Go*, Roth’s first novel, a woman spends an hour talking about her problems for the first time in a session she naively expects to be able to afford. Doctor Spielvogel reappears with a speaking role in Roth’s 1974 novel *My Life as a Man* and writes an ethically questionable article about his thinly disguised patient. *The Professor of Desire* and *The Breast* feature Dr. Klinger, whose difficult job is to help David Kepesh come to terms with, respectively, his split romantic life between love and passion and his transformation into a giant female breast. Though these doctors are often negatively portrayed, Berman states, “Roth pays tribute to psychoanalysis by demystifying the patient-analyst relationship and by refusing to render therapists into caricatures or mythic figures” (12). Roth himself gives characteristically vague reasons for returning to psychotherapy so often in his fiction: “All of these characters, in pain and in trouble, turn to doctors because they believe psychoanalysis may help them from going under completely” (*Reading* 93-94). Roth, however, does not have any illusions that the sessions he is writing, especially Portnoy’s, are accurate

reflections of any real life analogue. Though Roth draws upon his own several years in psychotherapy and shows the efforts of his research through his clear use of complicated Freudian principles, he recognizes the Portnoy session as

a highly stylized confession that this imaginary Spielvogel gets to hear, and I would guess that it bears about as much resemblance to the drift and tone of what a real psychopathologist hears in his everyday life as a love sonnet does to the iambs and dactyls that lovers whisper into one another's ears in motel rooms and over the phone. (*Reading* 94)

Many of Roth's later protagonists use medication as a method of regulating their minds and bodies, but these early characters invest money and time into analysis despite a shared distrust of its utility.

Roth may be second only to Allen in terms of fictional use of psychoanalysis to tell a story. Allen's affiliation with therapy is so well known that the script for his character in the animated children's film *Antz* begins with him on an insect couch complaining about the difficulty for the middle child to get any attention in a family of five million. It's pointless to list all the films that feature psychoanalysis because it would be the same as his filmography with only a few exceptions. Allen himself has famously attended therapy throughout most of his adulthood, and though he plays down its significance to his personal life, he has been known to phone his analyst from a phone booth if his shooting schedule takes him away from New York City (Meade 99). He calls himself "a product of TV and psychoanalysis" (McCann 26), two things that he begrudges despite their importance in making him famous. This ambivalence towards analysis often shows up in the attitudes of certain characters who doggedly continue their

treatment plan while at the same time belittling its effectiveness and making plans to quit. Never does a character end his or her treatment. Allen does, however, dismiss dream interpretations outright as a terrible way to understand the unconscious. “Unless, of course, you’re a pharaoh,” he adds (Lax 23).

Occasionally, a film’s plot or central theme will revolve around a single Freudian idea or psychologically contrived situation, and this is certainly the case in *Annie Hall*, or *Anhedonia* as Allen insisted on calling it until the chairman of United Artist threatened to jump out of the window unless the title was changed. “Anhedonia,” a condition that Allen insists he has, is the medical term for “the absence of pleasure or the ability to experience it” (“Anhedonia” 71), and had the term actually appeared in white on black titles at the beginning of the film, the connection to Roth’s explosive book would have been even more explicit. *Portnoy’s Complaint* is, of course, named after the invented medical condition that Spielvogel has diagnosed in his client. The medical definition that serves as *Portnoy’s* epigraph reads,

A disorder in which strongly-felt ethical and altruistic impulses are perpetually warring with extreme sexual longings, often of a perverse nature [. . .] Acts of exhibitionism, voyeurism, fetishism, auto-eroticism and oral coitus are plentiful; as a consequence of the patient’s “morality,” however, neither fantasy nor act issues in genuine sexual gratification, but rather in overriding feelings of shame and the dread of retribution particularly in the form of castration. (1)

The definition concludes with Spielvogel’s theory that this behavior stems from the childhood mother-son relationship.

The symptom of these two disorders, one fictitious and the other a real neurological condition, are essentially the same, though the root cause of one is stated and the other is left open. This allows the two works to be both explorations of the two protagonists' lives and case studies of their neuroses. Roth gives his invented medical definition a root cause so that he might explore the early life of his character while Allen is only really interested in the present. The few connections he makes to Alvy's past through flashbacks, like the crosscutting between adult Alvy slamming into parked cars and childhood Alvy playing in bumper cars, are scattered infrequently and give the impression that the device is a remainder from the original, much longer script. Allen spends about ten minutes getting to the present relationship while Roth gives Portnoy over one hundred pages to complain about his parents before getting to *The Monkey*, and even then, he constantly returns to childhood and adolescence to explain his present behavior.

This difference of emphasis that probably arose out necessities like budget and time restraints for Allen is an interesting starting point for observing the two characters and their methods and understanding of psychoanalysis. Alex and Alvy, like their creators, show a thorough familiarity with analytical jargon and concepts. Keeping with the tradition of only giving Annie books with the word "death" in the title, Alvy purchases copies of Ernest Becker's *The Denial of Death* and Jacques Choron's *Death and Western Thought*, two books that draw on and respond to Freud's theories. Alex tells Spielvogel that he often falls asleep reading Freud's *Collected Papers*. This familiarity, though, does not necessarily mean that they are comfortable with the material or capable of applying their principles. After all, Alvy buys the books but does not give any

indication that he has read them, and though Alex actually does claim to be reading Freud, his reasons appear to alternate between the pornographic and soporific as he claims to “have been putting myself to sleep each night in the solitary confinement of my womanless bed with a volume of Freud in my hand. Sometimes Freud in hand, sometimes Alex in hand, frequently both” (*Portnoy's* 185). Based on this cursory reading of Freud, Alex diagnoses himself over and over again as he cycles through childhood memories, occasionally contradicting himself or changing his mind about what led *most* to his hang ups. For instance, he claims to have never recovered from his mother referring to his penis as “*your* little thing” upon eleven-year old Alex’s request for bathing suit with a built in jockstrap (51). She only referred to it as such “once, okay, but that once will last a lifetime” (50). However, one page prior to this revelation, he had lamented that his father’s “*shlong* brings to mind the fire hoses coiled along the corridors at school” that “passes streams of water as thick and strong as a rope,” while Alex “deliver[s] forth slender yellow threads that my euphemistic mother call a ‘sis’” (50). Every embarrassing thing his parents ever said or awkward situation they put him in, in Alex’s mind, inevitably led to the flawed character traits he is in therapy to address.

Alvy similarly interprets events in an analytical way that always serves his agenda. In one scene, Annie tells him about a dream she had just discussed at her first psychotherapy session, “Frank Sinatra is holding his pillow across my face and I can’t breathe. Yeah, and he’s strangling me, and I keep, you know, it’s . . .” Alvy suddenly breaks in with his own interpretation: “Well, well, sure...because he’s a singer and you’re a singer, you know, so it’s perfect. So you’re trying to suffocate yourself. It-it makes perfect sense. Uh, uh, that’s a perfect analytic . . . kind of insight.” Though Annie



has made many changes and gained confidence since she entered the relationship, Alvy prefers to think of her as the timid, ditzzy girl who shakily sang “It Had to Be You” to a hostile, noisy audience. He is the one encouraging her to take classes and begin seeing a therapist, but he has grown attached to his role as teacher or father to the helpless Annie, and his interpretation of the dream keeps these roles in place. Annie’s therapist had a different take on the matter: “She said, your name is Alvy *Singer*! Yeah, yeah, yeah, you. Because in the dream I break Sinatra’s glasses.” Alvy protests, “You never said Sinatra had glasses! So whatta you saying that I-I’m suffocating you?” The therapist’s ultimate conclusion is that Annie should begin coming in five times a week, and Alvy worries that his plan to educate Annie has backfired. A few seconds later, Annie professes that she doesn’t mind analysis, but she asks, “Will it change my wife?” Alvy seizes on the slip, insisting that it must be significant, but Annie protests, “Life. I said, ‘life!’” Alvy ignores her and turns toward the camera addressing the audience, “She said, ‘Will it change my wife.’ You heard that because you were there so I’m not crazy.” Annie clearly says “wife” in the film, but because the spectator is inside of Alvy’s head (enough so to be in direct conversation with him), the viewer hears what Alvy hears regardless of the reality. Either way, Alvy makes the Portnovian mistake of seeing everything in terms of psychoanalysis and failing to acknowledge the possible subjectivity of events. Alex makes this point most explicitly when he declares, “Dreams? If only they had been [. . .] Doctor, maybe other patients dream—with me, *everything happens*. I have a life *without* latent content. The dream thing *happens*!” (257). It is true that Alex seems to have led an extremely *symbolic* life with every event working towards the neuroses he is defined by, but these events, it must be remembered, are recounted by a mind that is consciously

ordering them in such a way as to build a case against his parents, justify his treatment of women, and entertain his analyst/audience.

After this preliminary look at these two works, explorations of minds torn between comedy and therapy, persuasion and entertainment, and trust and mistrust of the analytical listener, it is now time to begin looking at the broader themes explored by the two artists and evaluate the attacks upon their work. We will now move on to discuss the relationships Alex and Alvy have with the women in their lives (romantic, platonic, and familial) and the critiques and concerns voiced by feminist critics.

### III. MISOGYNIST PIG

“He had taken the ordinary stuff of our lives and lifted it into art.”

Mia Farrow

“Philip’s novels provided all one needed to know about his relationships with women,  
most of which had been just short of catastrophic.”

Claire Bloom

While Philip Roth has been called on to answer charges of misogyny ever since the publication of his first novella, *Goodbye Columbus* and its characterization of Brenda Patimkin as a stereotypical Jewish American Princess and sex object, Woody Allen, through most of his career, largely escaped this kind of criticism. Several scholars, including Sam Girgus, praised his ability to write respectable roles for his female characters and even called his ability to play a “feminine” male protagonist a feat that called for “major change” artistically (Girgus 9). This warm reception ended suddenly in 1992 when it was discovered that Allen was having an affair with Soon-Yi Previn, Mia Farrow’s adopted daughter, who is 34 years his junior. Allen and Previn married in 1997 on Christmas Eve and have since adopted two children, making this Allen’s longest relationship, but the public’s opinion of Allen’s character was irreparably damaged and his films and persona were perceived differently. Though his next few films (*Husbands and Wives* (1992), *Manhattan Murder Mystery* (1993), and *Bullets Over Broadway* (1994)) were well reviewed by critics and won awards, they were commercial disasters because, in part, the general public had turned against him and rejected the Allen persona

of lovable schlemiel. This downward trend continued until *Match Point*, one of Allen's most uncharacteristic films, was released over a decade later and earned back its own budget.

The Soon-Yi scandal has also followed him critically, leading many reviewers to find it irresistible to read the films as reflecting Allen's private life or, somehow, as a kind of metaphor for his tarnished reputation. Some don't even try to hide their emotional response. Reviewing Allen's 1997 film *Deconstructing Harry*, premiering within a week of Allen's controversial marriage to Previn, Maureen Dowd wrote a scathing article for *The Times* saying, "I saw a movie where more people were damaged than in all three hours of *Titanic*. These characters, too, were destroyed by a kind of iceberg—make that a Konigsberg." But after outlining every conceivable flaw, she cannot resist ending on a more visceral note: "Not to mention Soon-Yi" (Dowd). Retrospective viewings of films like *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex*, an anthology of short sketches about sexual deviance, and *Manhattan*, which features Allen in his forties carrying on a sexual relationship with a minor, convinced many in the public that Allen was a despicable person and guilty of the child molestation charges filed against him by Farrow on behalf of Dylan, Allen's adopted daughter.

Though this was the first full onslaught, these attacks on Allen's character did not mark the first time that his attitude towards women and relationships was called into question. Vivian Gornick, researching an article for *The Village Voice* in 1976 interviewed Allen in his apartment over dinner. She challenged him about the women in his films: "Tell me, you create out of a woman a foil who ultimately is the object of ridicule. Don't you see that? Don't you get enough flack from enough women so that you

can see that” (9). When Allen entertained in nightclubs many years earlier, Gornick enjoyed his standup comedy and also his early films, but she “began to see the arrested quality of his movies. The shocking thing was that he was forty and still chasing girls, still a schlep who was obviously stuck in his adolescent pursuit of sex” (11). She saw the same problem in *Annie Hall* when it was released the following year: “Alvy is not much brighter than Annie but he comes out on top” (Meade 114). Rabbis get offended at his Jewish jokes, Allen argued, and women get offended at his gender jokes. Gornick writes that she felt guilty telling him, “The stuff you do is one step removed from cunts, chicks, and broads” (9). “Yeah,” Allen answered, “but it’s one step removed.” He did not think it enough to make him a misogynist.

Later that same year, Gornick published a strident critique of Philip Roth’s fictional treatment of women when his picture (or mug shot) was included on the cover of *The Village Voice* along with Saul Bellow’s and Norman Mailer’s beneath the headline “Why Do These Men Hate Women?” In the article, she excuses the characterization of women in Roth’s early writings like *Goodbye Columbus* and *Portnoy’s Complaint* (as she did for Allen’s stand up comedy) as arising from the way that the flawed protagonists experience women, but she could not help but feel that the more recent fiction, most especially *My Life as a Man* “increasingly displays the kind of self-absorption that results in emotional stupidity” (“Why” 195). As many critics would assert, she believes that in *My Life as a Man*, “there is no distance between character and author” (196), so whatever comes out of the mouth of Peter Tarnopol should be taken as Roth’s own conscious belief. Gornick would be partially vindicated in 1988 when Roth wrote the purportedly nonfictional autobiography of his early life, *The Facts*, in which he revealed that

[t]he description in *My Life as a Man*, in the chapter ‘Marriage à la Mode,’ of how Peter Tarnopol is tricked by Maureen Johnson into believing her pregnant parallels almost exactly how I was deceived by Josie [his first wife]. [. . .] Probably nothing else in my work more precisely duplicates the autobiographical facts. (107)

This statement, of course, only covers the one incident within the one chapter in a book that Gornick criticizes in its entirety, but she does correctly identify an autobiographical side of the text. Recently, she has recanted her prior tolerance of *Portnoy* and declared that it stands for the first time in Jewish-American literature where “woman-hating is openly associated with a consuming anger at what it has meant to be pushed to the margin, generation after generation; humiliated time and again into second-class lives; deprived, in egalitarian America, of a place at the table in matters of social importance” (“End”).

Many critics disagree with Gornick’s reading of the works of Woody Allen and Philip Roth. Richard Schwartz, in his encyclopedic reference guide to Allen’s films, writes unambiguously that *Annie Hall* “was his first film to focus on the female protagonist instead of the male lead” (14). This argument is buttressed by the title of the film (though it was, of course, a compromise) and the Academy Award Diane Keaton received for the role, recognition that Allen had written a strong female part. But Schwartz does not back up his argument that Annie is the protagonist and Alvy is merely a secondary character with evidence or examples—probably because it is nearly impossible to do so. Alvy, the narrator of the film from whose consciousness the narrative springs, appears either physically or verbally in *every* scene of the film while

the audience is often in the dark as to where Annie is and what she is doing. Though the film opens with five minutes of character development taking the spectator through Alvy's childhood with hindsight's interpretation, only brief glimpses of Annie's past boyfriends are imagined in Alvy's head as he provides snide commentary. Ralph Rosenblum, who put together the first full cut of the film, called the film "far from being the story of a love affair" but instead should be seen as "a visual monologue" (275). Part of the confusion and a major reason that it is possible to see Annie as the central figure is Diane Keaton's excellent and natural performance. The character, Keaton says, "was a variation of me. Yes. It was an idealized version of me," and it is difficult to imagine another actress in the role. Annie's wardrobe, which became a fashion trend, was all pulled from Keaton's own personal closet, and even the name is from Keaton's biography: Annie is a nickname and Hall was her original surname. Through this proximity to reality and her own talents, she is able to play both the bubbly airhead she is at the chronological beginning of the film and the dour neurotic she becomes after spending enough time with Alvy. Had Keaton or another actress played the part less skillfully, it is doubtful that anybody would see Annie as the "focus" of the film. In fact, Allen has been fortunate throughout the majority of his career in being able to work with some of Hollywood's most talented actresses who have the ability to improve the written parts. Four of his actresses (Keaton, Diane Wiest, Mira Sorvino, and Penelope Cruz) have won Academy Awards for Best Actress or Best Supporting Actress, and an additional six women have been nominated for one of the categories without winning. Undoubtedly, Allen imagined and crafted these female characters, but the women who played those characters were instrumental in making them memorable.

In *Portnoy's Complaint* and *Annie Hall*, the actual female characters as written on the pages of the novel and the screenplay are not entirely representative of the body of work from these two alleged misogynists, but they do embody many of the feminist critiques from Gornick and others. There are a number of women who enter into the protagonists' romantic lives, but the two most important characters are, obviously, Annie and, arguably, Mary Jane Reed (henceforth referred to by her much more recognizable and differentiating nickname, The Monkey). In both works, these women begin their literary lives figuratively as students to their purportedly intellectually superior males who enjoy the control they have over and respect they receive from their fawning pupils. Annie, having just moved from Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin to New York City, astonishes the lifelong New Yorker Alvy with her language that is both outdated and, compared to his Brooklynese, rural. Upon their first meeting, she admits that she finds some of Sylvia Plath's poetry (after Alvy condescendingly ridicules the poet) as "neat." "Uh, I hate to tell yuh," Alvy responds, "but this is nineteen seventy-five, you know that 'neat' went out, I would say, at the turn of the century." In the beginning, he seems more charmed than annoyed by Annie's vocabulary and even looks pleased after Annie refers to one of his comedy acts as "neat," but when Annie begins to gain confidence and independence, Alvy looks for any opportunity to belittle and control her: "'Neat'! There's that—what are you—twelve years old? That's one o' your Chippewa Falls expressions! [*Mockingly*] 'He thinks I'm neat!'" Other expressions and words are, at first, endearing and cute to Alvy but irritate him as the chronology progresses—"la-de-da," "Grammy," "yo-yo"—even though he shows his readiness to mangle English by professing his "lerve," "lo-ove," and "loff" to Annie.



Alex Portnoy, too, tolerates and, perhaps, is aroused by The Monkey's sixties slang and less than formal English until the relationship begins to strain, and then everything out of her mouth seems to get under his skin. Driving home together after a weekend trip to Vermont, The Monkey turns on the radio and sings along to The Beach Boy's "Wouldn't It Be Nice" and continues using the title as she talks pleasantly to Alex. Instantly, Alex attacks with what he calls a compliment: "Amazing...Almost three days, and I haven't heard the hillbilly routine, the Betty-Boop-dumb-cunt routine, the teenybopper bit—" (196-197). When she cuts him off and protests by turning the radio back on and singing every word to the rock station, Alex tells Spielvogel, "The weekend might as well not have happened" due to her "remarkable performance, a tribute to the cerebellum" (197). Alex's bewilderment at The Monkey's language comes to a head when he finds a hand written note in The Monkey's apartment directed at the house cleaner (though he first thinks it a note *from* the cleaner): "dir willa polish the flor by bathrum *pleze* & dont furget the insies of windose mary jane r" (205). This nearly inscrutable message, Alex decides, can only be from, "a mind with the depths of a movie marquee" that is "ineducable and beyond reclamation" (206). From this point, Alex seems bent on destroying his girlfriend while, at the same time, controlling and maintaining the relationship.

The seemingly hopeless, in the minds of the protagonists, intellects of these two women do not stop Alex and Alvy from attempting to enforce some kind of refinement. Alvy pressures Annie to enter therapy, take adult education classes, and go further in creative efforts like photography and music. While at a bookstore, Alvy buys her two books about death and psychology, and in another scene takes her to see *The Sorrow and*

*the Pity*, a four-hour World War II documentary. Soon, though, he tries to take back the support and suggestions when they backfire. “Adult education is such junk! The professors are so phony. How can you do it?” Alvy demands after he feels threatened by Annie’s professor. When she does start reading on her own, Alvy criticizes her choices—as he made fun of her collection of poetry by Sylvia Plath and a book about cats, he now mocks Annie for reading *The National Review*. Once Annie is confident enough to give successful singing performances, Alvy withdraws his creative support and tries to keep her from meeting with a famous record producer who invites her to his Los Angeles studio. Again and again, he offers a constant stream of advice until Annie follows and benefits from it, and then he rescinds it and ridicules her for her independent decisions.

Before discovering The Monkey’s notorious note, Alex has the same dreams of educating his girlfriend when she asks for book recommendations. He puts together what he calls “Professor Portnoy’s ‘Humiliated Minorities, an Introduction’” or “The History and Function of Hatred in America” (209), which starts with Agee and goes through Adamic, Baldwin, Du Bois, and Dos Passos—books that Alex imagines The Monkey carrying around to her various modeling jobs: “To read? No! So as to impress some fairy photographer, to impress passers-by in the street, *strangers*, with her many-sided character!” (207). She does seem to make a legitimate attempt (most of Alex’s claims that she did not are speculative) to learn from Alex, especially on their trip to Vermont when she asks him to explain a complicated poem that he had recited in order to “[draw] attention to the chasm: I am smart and you are dumb” (192). After explaining Zeus, Agamemnon and other mythological figures important to understanding “Leda and the Swan” by William Butler Yeats, he performs the poem again slowly and watches The

Monkey looking “like a child trying to master a multiplication problem” (193-194). The second time around, she appears to have made some headway in penetrating the poem, but he cannot hold back his condescension when he declares her “not a dumb child—no, a quick and clever little girl! Not stupid at all! *This girl is really very special. Even if I did pick her up in the street!*” (194). Ultimately, Annie gains enough self-confidence in her relationship with Alvy that she follows her internal desires and moves to Los Angeles, and, whether or not she can be said to have gained the cultural edge over him, she does make her own decision. The Monkey, on the other hand, is only made *more* dependent on Alex’s guidance and submits to his desire to have group sex with a prostitute while on vacation in Italy—an act that leads to Alex’s sudden departure from both the hotel room and the relationship and also The Monkey’s threats of suicide.

This pattern that both men follow of wavering between lavish support and insensitive denouncement mirrors Alex’s (and perhaps Alvy’s, though the film leaves the audience in the dark) childhood relationship—or at least his memory of it—with his mother. His remarks to Spielvogel suggest that he may be engaging in what is known in psychology as splitting—seeing his mother as all-good at one moment and all-bad at another without an in-between. For instance, when recalling his childhood he claims, “When I am bad I am locked out of the apartment. I stand at the door hammering and hammering until I swear I will turn over a new leaf” (13). During these dramatic times he would remember his mother exclaiming, “I don’t love you any more, not a little boy who behaves like you do... We won’t be needing you any more” (15). A little later, though, Alex has another vision of his mother that is so idyllic, it can scarcely be construed as the same woman:

She has cleared and washed our luncheon dishes and (with my cute little assistance) returned them to their place [ . . . ] whistling like a canary all the morning through, a tuneless melody of health and joy, of heedlessness and self-sufficiency. When I crayon a picture for her, she showers—and now in the sunshine of her bedroom, she is dressing to take me downtown. (44-45)

In this memory, she talks to him constantly: “Who is going to stay with Mommy forever and ever? *Me*. Who is it who goes with Mommy wherever in the whole wide world Mommy goes? *Why me, of course. What a silly question—but don’t get me wrong, I’ll play the game!*” (46). But this dream is sexualized almost to Oedipal parody when he claims to remember following with their “tight, slow, agonizingly delicious journey up her legs the transparent stockings that give her flesh a hue of stirring dimensions,” and he can “smell the oil with which she has polished the four gleaming posts of the mahogany bedstead, where she sleeps with a man who lives with us at night and on Sunday afternoons. My father they say he is” (45). This romantic transference from past mother to present lover is essential (according to Alex) for understanding his difficulty maintaining a relationship. The viewer’s glimpse of Alvy’s relationship with his mother is not enough to make such claims, but given his characteristic affinities with Alex, it is not out of the question to imagine Alvy’s childhood being similarly marked by psychological splitting.

This becomes especially clear when looking at some of the other romantic relationships the men carry on before becoming involved with Annie and The Monkey. In Alvy’s case, he defines himself against his two ex-wives in ways that paradoxically

conflict with the way he defines himself against Annie. Robin, a highly educated woman who we first see dragging Alvy around a party full of book publishers and contributors to *The New Yorker*, *Commentary*, and other high-brow magazines, is more intellectual than Alvy and exudes the kind of confidence that Annie has towards the end of the film.

Though this party seems important for his wife's career, Alvy relocates to an unoccupied bedroom to watch the Knicks versus the Cavaliers basketball game on television. When his wife discovers him, she demands to know what he finds so "fascinating about a group of pituitary cases trying to stuff the ball through a hoop." "What's fascinating" Alvy responds indignantly, "is that it's physical. You know, it's one thing about intellectuals, they prove that you can be absolutely brilliant and have no idea what's going on." He pulls Robin down in bed and tries to kiss her, but she sits up straight and accuses him of "using sex to express hostility." In the next scene, they are in bed when a sudden siren rings out causing Robin to flip on the lamp and exclaim, "Dammit! I was so close," characterizing her as sexually frigid and uptight. Alvy must take "another in a series of cold showers." In this relationship, Alvy is the one pressuring the woman to have fun and enjoy things like sex and basketball instead of the higher intellectual pursuits that she enjoys. He shows no symptoms of his self-proclaimed Anhedonia. This dynamic is reversed when Annie tries to get Alvy to enjoy physical pleasures that she enjoys like marijuana, the LA sun, and Hollywood parties, causing Alvy to be the one protesting the baseness of such pursuits.

He meets his other ex-wife, Allison, at an Adlai Stevenson rally where he is performing his standup routine, but he is too wrapped up in political conspiracy theories to give her any attention after their marriage. This time it is Alvy who breaks up an on-

screen embrace as he announces, “H’m, I’m sorry, I can’t go through with this, because it—I can’t get it off my mind, Allison [. . .] it’s obsessing me!” No other Woody Allen character would abandon physical pleasure for politics. To the contrary, usually they use politics and intellectualism to get women into bed, not the other way around. Alvy, looking into the camera addresses the audience, “Why did I turn off Allison Portchnik? She was beautiful. She was willing. She was real . . . intelligent. Is it the old Groucho Marx joke? That—that I-I just don’t wanna belong to any club that would have someone like me for a member?” Sexually, Alvy appears to relate most to Allison, so this is the quality of himself he alters and, consequently, ruins the relationship.

This sudden reversal of a core characteristic shows up in *Portnoy’s Complaint* with Alex’s first major love, Kay Campbell, AKA The Pumpkin. At about the same time that Alvy and Allison were contributing to political rallies, Alex and The Pumpkin “went around Greene County ringing doorbells for Stevenson in our sophomore year” (218). He remembers her to Spielvogel as “an exemplary [. . .] thoroughly commendable and worthy human being” (216), and he speaks about her in the same idealized tone that he uses when remembering the positive side of his mother. When The Pumpkin misses her period, the two plan to marry and playfully discuss their invented future as “resident baby-sitters to a young faculty couple who were fond of us” in return for a small room to live in (230). When he continues the game and asks her ironically, “And you’ll convert, right?” she, a gentile, takes his question seriously: “Why would I want to do a thing like that?” (230). This simple remark that he admits to Spielvogel should have been what he, as an atheist, wanted to hear, sets him off into a rage that ends with his (again) sudden abandonment of her because, in his mind, she was nothing but a “simpleton-goy” whom

he finds “about as desirable as blubber in bed” (231). This, the same character who prior to this incident holds nothing but contempt for organized religion in general and Judaism in particular, leaves the perfect woman for reasons that, outside of these few pages, run contrary to his most basic make-up. He tolerates The Monkey’s slur that he has “Hebe eyes” and has his first sexual experience with an anti-Semitic girl who calls him a “kike” and a “mocky son of a bitch” (210; 180), but The Pumpkin’s “common sense, plainly spoken” reply is unforgivable and puts an end to his interest in her (230).

So, the role that both Alex and Alvy take on as educators of the seemingly inferior Annie and Mary Jane fits into a typical sequence of defining themselves against the women in their lives rather than keeping a set personality trait. This pattern of being chronically dissatisfied with and mean-spirited toward each romantic attachment (not to mention sexualizing them with nicknames like Pumpkin and Monkey) is a major reason for feminist critical interest in analyzing and critiquing the protagonists and, frequently, also the creators of those protagonists. The claims against them may be similar, but Allen and Roth respond to charges of misogyny in very different ways. For his part, Roth claims to have no idea why feminists take issue with his books. When, in a *Paris Review* interview, Hermione Lee asks him how he feels about the feminist attack on him, he responds simply, “What is it?” (“Art” 172). But this feigned ignorance is unconvincing, especially in light of the amount of ink devoted to such feminist attacks in his writings. In *Deception*, Roth’s 1990 novel consisting primarily of pre- or post-coital dialogue, the fictional character Philip plays a game called Reality Shift with his girlfriend in which the two role play in half-real, half-fantasy situations. One such round begins with the unnamed woman mimicking in a mock trial setting, almost verbatim, Vivian Gornick’s

1976 attack on Roth: “Can you explain to the court why you hate women?” (113). Philip responds, “But I don’t hate them,” and the woman continues the attacks: “If you do not hate women, why have you defamed and denigrated them in your books? Why have you abused them in your work *and* in your personal life?” (113). She concludes, “You are charged with sexism, misogyny, woman abuse, slander of women, denigration of women, defamation of women, and ruthless seduction, crimes all carrying the most severe penalties” (113-114), and even translates arguments made against him that he is an anti-Semite to refer to gender: “May I ask you, sir—what have you ever done that has been of service to women?” (113), and “Didn’t you think that those writings could be used against us by our enemies?” (114). Roth crafts her attacks so cogently that Philip has difficulty regaining the upper hand. “And why” he asks, “do you, may I ask, take the depiction of one woman as a depiction of all women?” (113). He maintains, as he has in interviews and elsewhere, that nasty characterizations of some of his characters follows directly from the nasty character of his ex-wife, claiming he is doing nothing worse than any other author who writes from life. In the end, despite her objections, Philip amorously ends the game, sidestepping the charges.

Roth’s biography, *The Facts*, ends with the fictional response of Nathan Zuckerman, whom Roth has asked to read and respond to the material. Zuckerman takes issue with the depiction of Roth’s first wife, the inspiration for Maureen from *My Life as a Man* and other characters, saying, “Yes, you see her as a bitch and you can’t help it and you’ll never be able to help it, certainly not while speaking in your own behalf” (175). He asserts that *My Life as a Man* could alternatively be titled “*My Ex-Wife the Bitch*” (177), and claims that all the other women in his autobiography are interchangeable: “they’re



helpmeets and sexpots and partners and pals” (179). This is the kind of candor that interviewers and scholars like Hermione Lee had been looking for, and it turns out Roth could best achieve it through the reality-shift and ventriloquizing of fiction.

Allen, who seems less aware or capable of defending his films against feminist critiques, is mostly silent on the relationship between his work and its reception among academics, refusing to read reviews or articles about his work. When he is challenged about under-representing or badly categorizing a specific group of people, he usually responds that he simply writes about the culture that he knows in the way that he experiences it. This statement is ultimately the key to understanding the work of either Roth or Allen. When Roth did get around to answering Lee’s question about a feminist attack, he said, “I’m sorry if my men don’t have the correct feelings about women...but I do insist that there is some morsel of truth in my depiction of what it might be like for a man to be a Kepesh, or a Portnoy, or a breast” (“Art” 175). Roth, as a writer who frequently works from his own experience, is interested in what it is to be a man. He told Philip Dodd in a BBC interview upon the publication of his 2008 novel *Indignation*, “The story of male vulnerability is one I’ve told repeatedly...I’ve had to have two landscapes which [are] Newark, New Jersey and the male body.” When asked which he prefers he laughingly replied, “They’ve both aged terribly.” With notable exceptions Allen, too, seems most interested in telling stories about men, and the protagonists are almost always reflections of his distinctly male persona even when, like in *Another Woman* or *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, they are played by women. As Sam Girgus noted, those males might have feminine characteristics, but they are still studies of men and masculinity.

The subject of feminine or emasculated males is one of Roth's favorite subjects. If the women in his books are monstrous and controlling, the men are often impotent or powerless. Alex Portnoy, like many of the recent aged protagonists, is rendered impotent at the end of the novel. Zuckerman, both Nathan and his brother Henry, must choose between a life without sex or the strong possibility of death on an operating table in *The Counterlife*. The fingers that puppeteer Mickey Sabbath uses to sexually manipulate the women in his life are crippled with arthritis in *Sabbath's Theater*. Most extreme of all is David Kepesh's transformation from a prominent Kafka scholar and professor into a giant female breast in *The Breast*. Roth is exploring masculinity, but it is a masculinity that is under attack from society, age, and art. Many readers miss the vulnerability present in a figure like Portnoy because they focus on his misguided misogyny and unquenchable lust, but his manhood seems at times to be as tenuous as Kepesh's. If Leonard Zelig of *Zelig* is any indication, Allen is less enthusiastic about this middle-ground of gender—Zelig is the supernaturally shape-shifting man who physically and mentally becomes whatever he is surrounded by (psychiatrists, Asians, the obese), but he always maintains his male gender and his proclivity towards womanizing. Allen's males are often cartoonishly masculine in their unlikely seductive powers, enthusiasm for sports, and denial of male intimacy, but these may only be masks for the true feminine males underneath.

The best example is *Manhattan*. Allen plays Isaac, a television writer struggling to write a serious novel whose ex-wife has just left him to be in a lesbian relationship and plans to write a tell-all memoir about it. Additionally, he has little contact with his son and worries that he will be too feminine being raised by two women: "Very few people

survive one mother.” After (allegedly) trying to run down her lover with his car, Isaac accosts his ex-wife on the street and desperately asks her, “How’s Willy? [. . .] Does he play baseball? Does he wear dresses?” Those two alternatives—sports or cross-dressing—are emblematic of the two unambiguous categories of gender that disallow any sort of fluidity in Allen’s films, but Isaac is a clear exception. Cuckolded (and by two women no less) Isaac desperately tries to regain his virility and manhood as “The Nebbish King,” Lee Fallon’s play on the Fisher King myth from Arthurian legend (47). He does so by quitting his inartistic job writing for television and by attempting to sexually dominate two women at once: Tracy, an innocent and beautiful seventeen-year-old girl, and Mary, a neurotic intellectual snob who is dating Isaac’s best friend, Yale. For a while everything seems to be on track for Isaac’s reentry into manhood—he receives praise for his book, dismisses his underage girlfriend with mock integrity, wins Mary away from Yale, and watches his son play sports—however, things quickly fall out from under him. His ex-wife’s book is devastating. She writes, “Making love to this deeper more masterful female made me realize what an empty experience, what a bizarre charade sex with my husband was.” She goes on, though never achieving the venom of Farrow’s future book, to pick apart character flaws unsympathetic reviewers had been noticing since Allen’s early pictures:

He was given to fits of rage, Jewish, liberal paranoia, male chauvinism, self-righteous misanthropy, and nihilistic moods of despair. He had complaints about life but never any solutions. [. . .] In his most private moments, he spoke of his fear of death, which he elevated to tragic heights when, in fact, it was mere narcissism.

Mary returns to Yale, and Willy takes up ballet. Even Yale's wife blames him for her husband's affair because he assumes that Isaac introduced Mary into Yale's personal life. When he has lost everything else, he attempts to reconcile with Tracy, but she is leaving for six months to study acting in London. While she hints that they can be together when she returns, the film ends before a pat resolution, and Isaac's manhood is still in limbo.

Allen would never cast himself as a character so realistically struggling with masculinity again. Instead, his protagonists would drift back towards the comic schlemiel common in his earlier films—somehow able to seduce the women and come out on top despite themselves—without actually returning to them wholly. *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan* (if I may, like the majority of Allen fans, ignore the intervening *Interiors*) marked the beginning of Allen's mature phase as a filmmaker when he was able to most accurately represent problems of gender and sexuality in a realistic, or at least subjectively realistic, way. Later, the rhetoric and accusations of *Manhattan*'s spurned lover's kiss-and-tell memoir will be taken up in greater detail, but first we will turn to the "fits of rage," and "paranoia" Isaac's ex-wife specifically designated as "Jewish" and the critics who elaborated on those claims.

#### IV. SELF-HATING JEW

“Do me a favor, my people, and stick your suffering heritage up your suffering ass.”

Philip Roth *Portnoy's Complaint*

“Hey, I may hate myself, but not because I'm Jewish.”

Woody Allen *Deconstructing Harry*

Though there are a number of candidates, the loudest and most notorious protests against Philip Roth's novels and short stories have been accusations of anti-Semitism and self-hatred from the Jewish American community. From the earliest nationally published stories in *The New Yorker* and *The Paris Review* in 1958 and 1959, critics and religious figures have condemned Roth's fiction for negatively characterizing some of his Jewish characters. These characters, the objectors argued, conformed to harmful anti-Semitic stereotypes like Sheldon Grossbart as a “goldbrick” and Brenda Patimkin as a “Jewish American Princess” (Cooper 34; Gross 17). Even his first recorded interview is entirely devoted to defending “Defender of the Faith” against such attacks by Charles Angoff, a critic who published many scathing reviews of *Goodbye Columbus*. The young Roth is more diplomatic in his interview than he would later prove to be, but he cannot help showing his indignation when he calls the claims that he is racist “just a damn lie. There is a kind of reverse prejudice that says all Jews are good [. . .] and it does a great deal of harm to our sense of reality” (“NBA” 1). Later, Roth would allow his protagonist Nathan Zuckerman to answer some of the most strident attacks against him through fiction including a prominent rabbi's claim that Roth's early fiction would “warm the heart of a

Julius Streicher or a Joseph Goebbels” (*The Ghost Writer* 67). Roth later remembered one New York City rabbi who wrote to the Anti-Defamation League of the B’nai Brith after the publication of “Defender of the Faith” asking, “What is being done to silence this man?” (“Confusion” 195). Discussing the third book of the Zuckerman trilogy, *The Anatomy Lesson*, Roth says, “It [the rabbi’s question] came to me when I was writing this book, and that’s why I broke Zuckerman’s jaw. I did it for the rabbi. It [charges of defamation] started when I started” (“Confusion” 195).

Woody Allen’s films and political beliefs have also inspired denunciation and rabbinical censure for many of the same reasons. Rabbi Daniel Lapin, founder of the conservative group Toward Tradition, said,

Woody at his worst was breathtakingly hostile to Judaism. One need only recall how many of Woody’s films portray Jews, not to mention rabbis, as loathsome liars, desperate psychotics, pathetic perverts, and ridiculously lecherous losers. If Woody Allen were not Jewish, surely every Jewish organization would have roundly denounced him. And they would have been right.

Like Roth’s characters, Allen’s are often both flawed and Jewish, and the mere fact that they are both leads to accusations of self-hatred and irreverence towards serious subjects. Allen’s few political acts have not won him favor with mainstream Jewish opinion. In 1988, Allen wrote a New York Times Op Ed called “Am I Reading the Papers Correctly” that questioned Israel’s use of violence to control Palestinian protesters: “Are these the people,” he asks, “whose money I used to steal from those little blue-and-white cans after collecting funds for a Jewish homeland?” (A27). He admits in the first line, “I’m not a

political activist” but goes on to express incredulity at the examples of cruelty that had been outlined in *The Times* over the last few weeks. His Op-Ed was received with predominately negative reviews to the editor. One writer called Allen’s view of how Israel should treat Palestinians as “a naïve ideal” (Levine A34) while Stuart Paskow, the director of communication and information for the Jewish National Fund, called it “unfortunate and inaccurate” (187). Another writer answered, “Yes, Mr. Allen, you are reading the papers correctly. Why haven’t you been reading them for the last 40 years?” (Nackley 187), and yet another, Judith Brenner, gave him the familiar title of “self-hating Jew” (Mitchell A34). No response was more bizarre, though, than Philip Roth’s in the 1993 novel *Operation Shylock* in which he has George Ziad, a radical Palestinian activist, say,

It ranks as Woody Allen’s best joke yet. Philip, the guy isn’t a shlimazl just in the movies. Woody Allen believes that Jews aren’t capable of violence. Woody Allen doesn’t believe that he is reading the papers correctly—he just can’t believe that Jews break bones. Tell us another one, Woody. (141)

It is undeniable that Allen and Roth tend to write Jewish characters into their works and give those characters negative characteristics, but it is difficult to fault either artist as they so frequently use themselves as actors (literally for Allen and metaphorically for Roth) in the drama. It is an accident of birth that Jews are the subjects of most of Allen’s films and Roth’s books, and superior character designations might be terms such as urban, intellectual, or artistic rather than categories based solely of ethnicity. Roth, early in his career, experimented with writing “the other” by refusing the

workshop dictum to “write what you know” in the Midwestern, gentile, female saga of *When She Was Good*. In this novel, he not only omits the Jewish characters and characterizations that had enraged readers of *Goodbye Columbus*, but he also ascribed negative and, one could argue, stereotypical traits to the gentile characters, proving to critics that he can draw unattractive characters no matter their race, creed, or color. Reviewers disagreed as to the merits and success of Roth’s “anthropological expedition,” but the majority received his return to Jewish subjects in *Portnoy’s Complaint* with “a howl of relief” (Shostak 115, 117). Allen would find it trickier to escape the designation of a Jewish artist because his standard role of the neurotic New Yorker quickly became synonymous with a Jewish type even though non-Jews like Mia Farrow and Kenneth Branagh would play the character virtually to a T in later films. Films that do not allude to or identify the ethnicity of Allen’s character are still frequently classified as Jewish because of the character’s familiar nebbish appearance and distinctive Brooklyn accent.

What makes the designation of Allen and Roth as Jewish artists particularly problematic is that their protagonists are almost entirely divorced from the religious aspects of Judaism and tend to be rebellious against the cultural norms of other Jews. The most telling example of this found in *Portnoy’s Complaint* and *Annie Hall* relates to food and the ritual of eating. In fact, the only religious custom that the Portnoys appear to rigorously enforce is that of *Kashrut*, the Jewish dietary kosher laws, but even this practice is subject to revision. Alex tells Spielvogel about family dinners at a Chinese restaurant where “the Lord has lifted the ban on pork dishes for the obedient children of Israel,” but still, “the eating of lobster Cantonese is considered by God (Whose mouthpiece on earth, in matters pertaining to food, is my Mom) to be totally out of the



question” (90). This pork allowance runs contrary to Sophie Portnoy’s obsession with what her family eats. In an earlier scene where Alex feigns diarrhea in order to sneak away from the dinner table to masturbate, Sophie demands, “Alex, I want an answer from you. Did you eat French fries after school? Is that why you’re sick like this?” (22). She mistakes his moans of pleasure for those of pain and insists that Alex leave the toilet unflushed and see a doctor. She then goes on to accuse him of eating pork after school in the form of hotdogs, a food that she unequivocally calls *chazerai*, Yiddish for trash or junk food. Though she has just given her lecture religious weight, she is only using “*chazerai*” as a springboard to her broader dietary concern for her son and his friends—“To him a meal is an O Henry bar washed down by a bottle of Pepsi” (24). So why is Alex allowed to eat pork at the Chinese restaurant? Alex answers his own question:

Because . . . frankly I still haven’t got the whole thing figured out, but at the time I believe it has largely to do with the fact that the elderly man who owns the place, and whom amongst ourselves we call “*Shmendrick*,” isn’t somebody whose opinion of us we have cause to worry about. (90)

He goes on to theorize further that because the pork is chopped and shredded so thoroughly that no one would be able to tell where the meat came from it is safe to eat. This further removes Sophie’s dietary concerns from the sacred sphere and places them closer to the area of appearances. Even Alex uses racially prejudiced language to talk about Chinese Americans, saying that “the insides of their heads are just so much fried rice” and that their English “makes my father sound like Lord Chesterfield” (90). They may abandon their religious and cultural customs in the Chinese restaurant because they feel, as Jews, superior to the Chinese owner and, therefore, able to eat whatever they

would like around him.

Alex's rationalizing of the shredded pork is not entirely logical, but his mother's reason for not eating lobster is: "Because it can kill you! Because I ate it once, and I nearly died!" (91). Sophie ate the lobster "in her wild youth" because of either an order mix up by the waiter or a practical joke from a drunken date, but regardless, the "tragic" event "paralyzed" her (91-92). Once again, the prohibition against shellfish is not religious, but personal. Monitoring her family's diet is one of the motifs Alex uses to illustrate her controlling nature. It is over food that Sophie supposedly threatens young Alex with castration and exclaims, as Alex remembers it, "Wouldn't she give me the food out of her own mouth, don't I know that by now?" (16). Alex's sister Hannah and father Jack both defer to Sophie's control and show its consequences. Hannah, apparently, did not need a threatening knife to eat her meals and was, according to Alex, "fat and 'sluggish'" at age twelve due, at least partly, to her mother's desire to overfeed. Jack is constantly constipated and forever obsessed with what he eats. He represents the extreme of temperance and regulation, as Alex explains, "He drank—of course, not whiskey like a *goy*, but mineral oil and milk of magnesia; and chewed on Ex-Lax; and ate All-Bran morning and night; and downed mixed dried fruits by the pound bag" (4-5).

Alex resists both the implied religious ramifications and his mother's well-intentioned control of his diet by eating whatever he likes and ignoring his parents' advice. "But I don't want the food from her mouth," he cries. "I don't even want the food from my plate—that's the point" (16). He takes this resistance to the extreme by "conquering" his family in the same way that he "conquers" America. He has a piece of liver "round my cock in the bathroom at three-thirty—and then had again on the end of a

fork, at five-thirty, along with other members of that poor innocent family of mine. [. . .] I fucked my own family's dinner" (134). Though there is presumably a long list of things to choose from, Alex calls this, "the worst thing I have ever done" and treats the confession more like a Catholic than an analyst by calling Spielvogel "Your Holiness" (134). Alex takes a dim view of the religious dietary laws as he explains his first experience eating lobster, "What else, I ask you, were all those prohibitive dietary rules and regulations all about to begin with, what else but to give us little Jewish children practice in being repressed?" (79). *Kashrut* dietary laws are metonymic for the Jewish religion and its laws as a whole—instilling shame into people and urging them to ignore their appetites and desires. "Shame" is mentioned thirty times throughout the book and it is never too far from Alex, even when he is most following his desires. "Renunciation is all, cries the koshered and bloodless piece of steak my family and I sit down to eat at dinner time," Alex mimics before launching into what he thinks these laws and regulations are really about, defining the law's followers against the American majority (80). Though Jews care not about the Chinese restaurant owner, Alex theorizes, they separate themselves through strict custom in order to be superior to their Gentile neighbors.

Let the *goyim* sink *their* teeth into whatever lowly creature crawls and grunts across the face of the dirty earth, we will not contaminate our humanity thus. Let *them* (if you know who I mean) gorge themselves upon anything and everything that moves, no matter how odious and abject the animal, [. . .] a diet of abominable creatures well befits a breed of mankind so hopelessly shallow and empty-headed as to drink, to divorce, and to

fight with their fists. (81)

Alex jumps from food to ethics so suddenly that there is hardly any transition. Eating pigs, shellfish, and other *chazerai* foods is symbolic of how vile “goys” really are as people, and this is probably why he eats hotdogs, lobster, and other forbidden foods when he gets older: he is trying to unlearn that repression and live a shameless life. It is obvious, though, from his conflicted vision of the Gentile/Jew divide that he has not yet reconciled his desire and shame in a way that would allow him to see the world other than the polarized version he developed in childhood. He can transgress with the best of them, but shame, so far, is inescapable.

Though it is certainly not as pronounced, Allen explores the social and cultural importance of food and eating in *Annie Hall*. At a deli, Alvy shows disdain from a secular rather than a religious Jewish perspective, as he cannot help but cringe in disgust when Annie orders pastrami on white bread with tomatoes, lettuce, and mayonnaise. Alvy has only had to ask for the corned beef and the waiter instantly understands due to cultural dining patterns, but Annie (as if the audience must be reminded once again that she is not Jewish) breaks the cultural “laws” and is silently admonished. Though Alvy’s initial feelings of superiority over Annie focus on her recent entrance into urban culture and distinctive markers like language and family, his status as insider to a cultural minority group seems to fuel at least some of his condescension. Alvy and many of Allen’s other characters, as opposed to Portnoy and Roth’s, tend to downplay the fact that they are Jewish but cannot always resist a subtle pride in defining themselves against the gentile majority. *Annie Hall* co-writer Marshall Brickman playfully pointed out the film’s Jewish quality when he recommended the titles *It Had to Be Jew* and *Me and My Goy* in place of

*Anhedonia* (Meade 111). But for Alvy, this Jewish concern for proper eating does not extend to *Kashrut* laws. Two of the most famous scenes in *Annie Hall*, and perhaps in the genre of Romantic Comedies in general, involve the two animals that gave Alex so much grief nearly a decade earlier. The first is early in the film at a beach house in the Hamptons after Alvy and Annie have brought home live lobsters to eat. The crustaceans have gotten loose and Annie is frantically trying to corral them so that they don't "turn up in our bed at night." Alvy is noticeably squeamish and yells to Annie, perhaps alluding to the fact that she is a gentile, "Talk to him. You speak shellfish!" As they catch them and throw them in the pot, Alvy poses dangling the creatures at arm's length for several pictures that later appear in Annie's apartment. In another scene, while having Easter dinner with Annie's family, Alvy exclaims that the dish is "dynamite ham!" To make things even more clear, he imagines himself in the mind's eye of the anti-Semitic cook, Grammy Hall, as dressed in ultra-orthodox garb wearing a full Hasidic beard as he eats the pork. As a final touch, he tells Grammy that he is doing so well in therapy that soon they might let him take off the lobster bib. Alvy does not exactly show contempt for the laws of *Kashrut* that shamed young Portnoy and angered adult Portnoy, but his complete disregard for kosher law in such central scenes shows a changed attitude from *Portnoy's Complaint*—perhaps the very attitude Alex was trying to achieve through therapy.

Part of the reason for this quick transition from tentative tradition to indifference is the improvement after World War II in living conditions, job prospects, and education for Jewish American families that allowed the children to further assimilate into American culture. Alex's father (like Roth's own) faces anti-Semitism at the insurance company where he works and entertains little hope of advancing in the company because

of his ethnicity and lack of education, but his son Alex is an enormous success at the age of thirty-three owing primarily to the new opportunities he enjoys. While Jack Portnoy is defining himself *against* gentile (and, in part, mainstream American) culture, Alex strives to break free of the constraints his semi-religious upbringing forced upon him. Alvy, on the other hand, is about ten years older than Alex and does not mention his parents except through flashback, perhaps implying that they have died or fallen out of touch with their son, but the matter is not really important to the film because Alvy does not display the same kind of obsession with his past that Alex shows. The problems of identity and difficulties of assimilation that plagued the children of immigrants and survivors of the Holocaust were still pressing issues but not as central to those who were now middle aged and had attained a certain level of success as individuals rather than as a family or cultural group.

The Easter scene mentioned above may have its roots in a closely parallel scene from *Portnoy's Complaint* in which Alex, against his parents' strongest wishes, travels across the country with his girlfriend Kay Campbell (The Pumpkin) on Thanksgiving for what he calls, "a memorable weekend in my lifetime, equivalent in human history, I would say, to mankind's passage through the entire Stone Age" (223). He has been invited to Davenport, Iowa as a "weekend guest" and reports his observations as if he were an anthropologist or, sometimes, a captive (220). Experiencing Alvy's same trepidation and paranoia about being a Jew among gentiles, Alex cannot believe that he is "eating off dishes that had been touched by the hands of a woman named *Mary*" (223), the matriarch of Christianity whom he refers to as "the enemy" (226). For reasons he cannot explain, he expects anti-Semitism from the moment he steps off the train, but he is

surprised by Mr. Campbell's courtesy and feels compelled to announce his ethnicity to the family. He decides that his "eloquent appendage called [his] nose" has done the announcing already just as Alvy imagines himself looking like an exaggerated rabbi at the dinner table. Interwoven within these reports of this genteel gentile family are phone calls home and thoughts of family traditions like the Weequahic-Hillside football game and the long drive with his father to buy "'real apple cider' at a roadside farmer's market" (226). Inexplicably, he finds himself angry and indignant for a slight that no one even made: "Why have I deserted my family? Maybe around the table we don't look like a painting by Norman Rockwell, but we have a good time, too, don't you worry!" (226). Alvy makes the same observation ("Grammy Hall? What did you do, grow up in a Norman Rockwell painting?") as he looks at the camera and explains that the Halls are "Nothing like my family. You know, the two are like oil and water." The screen then splits and shows the two juxtaposed families at table with overlapping dialogue as the Halls talk about "swap meets and boat basins" while the Singers talk about diabetes and work. The original cut of *Annie Hall* extended the meditation on the difference between Jewish and Gentile dinner conversation by reversing the speech patterns of the two families. Alvy's normally boisterous father speaks with the Halls' civil tone, requesting a martini "on white bread with mayonnaise" (Rosenblum 280). Both protagonists find themselves far from home in the alienating country anticipating anti-Semitism that is either imagined or unspoken, reinforcing their self-identification as outsiders or separated by culture. However, it is again not the religious customs that mark Alex and Alvy's paranoia and trepidation, but rather cultural identification against an American mainstream that makes the dinners uncomfortable.

Another group that the Jewish American protagonists of Roth and Allen's fictions identify themselves against is that of European Jews who experienced the horrors of the Second World War. Both Allen and Roth grew up in the United States during the war and were intensely aware of the Holocaust's toll on Jews and other non-Aryans on the opposite side of the Atlantic. Roth and Allen are not commonly thought of as being artists that explore the Holocaust through art because they have never represented it directly like many of their American contemporaries, but its existence is often just below the surface of plot or in between the lines of dialogue. Writers like Cynthia Ozick and Saul Bellow and filmmakers like Steven Spielberg and Sidney Lumet who have incorporated plots, characters, and images that come directly from the historical reality of the Holocaust stir debates about the limits and ethics of representation among academics and the general public at large, but the subtler works by Roth and Allen, using allusion rather than depiction, are just as important to the discussion.

Alex Portnoy's adolescent instruction, "Do me a favor, my people, and stick your suffering heritage up your suffering ass" (76), is the statement that most people remember Roth for on the subject of the Holocaust, but that sentiment does not reoccur in the more mature thinker, Nathan Zuckerman, as he dwells on the Holocaust in *Zuckerman Bound*, the trilogy and epilogue that would occupy Roth for much of the 1980s. Near the exact center of the project, in *The Anatomy Lesson*, Roth hits on a central metaphor for the Holocaust and its effect on the collective consciousness of American Jews. Nathan Zuckerman's mother develops a brain tumor shortly after becoming a widow and is asked to write her name on a slip of paper. "Instead of 'Selma,' [she writes] the word 'Holocaust,' perfectly spelled" (289). Roth writes, "This was in Miami Beach in 1970,



inscribed by a woman whose writings otherwise consisted of recipes on index cards, several thousand thank-you notes, and a voluminous file of knitting instructions. Zuckerman was pretty sure that before that morning she'd never even spoken the word aloud" (289). This unconscious identification of an average Jewish housewife and mother is also fitting of many novels published during a time when encounters with the facts and images of the Holocaust were gradually becoming more widespread—the word “Holocaust” etched between the lines of books that seemed to have nothing to do with the Shoah. But even without directly representing World War II Europe, writers like Roth bent their stories around the magnetism that an event of such magnitude forces onto the world.

The other three parts of the *Zuckerman Bound* series return to the Holocaust through the specter of Anne Frank, appearing in the form of a European houseguest in *The Ghost Writer*, a movie star in *Zuckerman Unbound*, and a once famous Czech stage actress in *The Prague Orgy*. While each novel has a primary story arc that has no readily apparent connection to the Holocaust or the historical Anne Frank, there are recurrent returns and connections to the tragedy. In an interview after the third novel was published, Roth explained that the Holocaust was not the subject of the book, but

for most reflective American Jews, I would think, it is simply there, hidden, submerged, emerging, disappearing, unforgotten. You don't make use of it—it makes use of you. [. . .] There is a certain thematic architecture to these three books that I hope will make itself felt when they're published in one volume. (“Confusion” 197)

Anne Frank and her diary also illustrate a concept that *Zuckerman Bound* frequently explores: the unintended, unaccountable uses of art. In *The Ghost Writer*, Anne's diary is used to sanctimoniously berate a young author for his irreverent attitude towards Jews and Judaism. In *Zuckerman Unbound*, it launches the career of a glamorous actress turned socialite who broke into show business through the stage version, and finally, in *The Prague Orgy* it ends the promising career of another young actress who is accused of being Jewish because of the characters she plays. These few *uses* of the Holocaust and one of its victims may be uncomfortable to talk about but, nevertheless, are very real and indicate a more complex way of examining the effects of the Holocaust. Some readers and reviewers criticized Roth for these imaginings and reinventions, but what they were really objecting to was the deviation from a single narrative for the Holocaust and, more specifically, the life and death of Anne Frank.

Allen also uses the Holocaust in his films without actually representing it in order to explore philosophical rather than historical questions. In *Crimes and Misdemeanors* Judah, a successful doctor with an ostensibly perfect family life, is blackmailed by a mistress he has promised to run away with. When she will not back down, Judah has her killed and is briefly tormented by paranoia and guilt until he realizes that he has gotten away with it. At his most frantic, Judah has a flashback, imagining himself as an adult witnessing a childhood Seder as his extended family argues about religion. Aunt May, an atheist, is complaining about being forced to go through the motions of the tradition and pointedly asks Judah's father Sol if he thinks he will be punished if he strays from the strict rules. "He won't punish me," Sol answers, "He punishes the wicked." Aunt May seizes the opportunity: "Who, like Hitler? Six million Jews burned to death and they got

away with it!”

Though Hitler and the Nazis did not “get away with it” with their lives, Aunt May expresses outrage at Sol’s belief in God after such an atrocity. “What moral structure?” she asks, “For those who want morality, there’s morality. Nothing’s handed down in stone.” Crucially, Sol claims that even if God does not exist, he will keep his faith: “If necessary, I will always choose God over truth.” Allen’s character in *Hannah and Her Sisters* must object to Judaism for the same reasons when, after briefly converting to Catholicism, he demands of his mother, “Just on a simplistic level, why were there Nazis?” This reduction of the Holocaust as an event down to a philosophical argument could be interpreted as an unforgivable trivialization, but what both Roth and Allen achieve by using the Holocaust in unique ways is actually a pluralizing effect. Roth recognized that Anne Frank’s individual narrative was quickly beginning to stand in for a totalized narrative for the Holocaust due to the diary’s status as a bestselling book, a hit Broadway play, and an Oscar winning film, but by resurrecting her in *Zuckerman Bound*, he was able to open up other points of entry to the limitless narrative interpretations of such an infinite event. Allen, too, is able to connect to the historical immensity of the Holocaust on a more trivial, individual level and ask questions about modern Jewish identity that, with a monolithic understanding of history, would not be possible.

Whenever an established single narrative, especially one of such tragic magnitude, is questioned, the immediate and vehement reaction tends to be hostility. Rabbi Elliot B. Gertel, after watching Allen’s *Deconstructing Harry*, said that the film “is not a commentary on bad decisions; it is a bad decision. It is a choice for Hell, and rejection of Heaven for the sake of two-or-three one-liners about Jews, Jewish women,

and Hadassah” (94). Unfortunately, Gertel objects most strongly to and bases his damnation on an irresponsibly misquoted line from the film. In the movie, when Allen’s character is accused of being a self-hating Jew and a Holocaust denier, he responds, “Not only do I know that we lost six million, but the scary thing is that records are made to be broken,” but Gertel remembers the character as saying, “Not only do I not deny the Holocaust [but] I think records are made to be broken” (93). A potentially offensive remark expressing fear and dismay becomes, in Gertel’s mind, a vicious, self-hating slur encouraging genocide. This large a mistake can only be due to a knee-jerk reaction against a perceived attack on an emotionally held belief. The philosopher Gershom Scholem reviewed *Portnoy’s Complaint* from Jerusalem where the historical memory of the Holocaust informed his outraged prediction that, soon, “this book will make all of us defendants at court. [. . .] This book will be quoted to us—and how it will be quoted! They will say to us: Here you have the testimony from one of your own artists, [. . .] an authentic Jewish witness” (Cooper 110). Though the responses that his article received accused him of being as delusional as the novel’s protagonist, he stood by his argument that *Portnoy’s Complaint* would prove to be more historically damaging than *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*: “I wonder what price *k’lal yisrael* [the world Jewish community]—and there is such an entity in the eyes of the Gentiles—is going to pay for this book. Woe to us on that day of reckoning!” (111). Again, the critic’s adherence to a single narrative of history causes him to read against the grain of fiction in an attempt to find a historically destructive page on which to seize.

Two works, though they do not directly represent or talk about the Holocaust, use the German persecution of European Jews as an unspoken but underlying metaphor for

the fears that American Jews felt as details of the Final Solution became clear: Allen's 1991 *Shadows and Fog* and Roth's 2004 *The Plot Against America*. Allen's film, based on his one act play *Death* is crafted to look and feel like a German Expressionist film from the '20s and '30s such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* by Robert Wiene or *M* by Fritz Lang with "The Cannon Song" from Kurt Weill's and Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* serving as soundtrack. These dark and distinctly militarist German elements place the film just before Hitler's rise to power and create an intensely ominous air to the plot, which has Allen playing Kleinman ("Little Man," a character out of Yiddish folklore), a lone Jew wandering the streets waiting for an angry mob to let him in on the plan for catching a serial killer. As he waits to be filled in, he finds a family of "undesirables" being evicted from their home by the police and religious officials making a list of such undesirables (Kleinman is not only on the list, but his name is circled) before the paranoid mob turns on him and attempts to murder him. Though the film is not well made and represents one of Allen's biggest failures both commercially and critically, these images and elements of World War II and German culture make *Shadows and Fog* an important film for understanding Allen's feelings of the Holocaust and, perhaps, give viewers an idea of the perpetual fear American Jews in the '30s and '40s lived under. Perpetual fear would be the first sentence and final chapter title of Roth's novel *The Plot Against America*, a book that imagines an alternate history of The United States during the Second World War in which anti-Semite and isolationist Charles Lindbergh is elected president in place of FDR. Jewish relocation programs, increased anti-Semitism, and an American *Kristallnacht* follow Lindbergh's "understanding" with Hitler, causing Philip Roth, the character, to fret along with his family that an American

Holocaust was imminent. In both works, a *deus ex machina* ending saves the characters from the historical fate that seemed destined for them, but this perpetual fear and paranoia successfully reflects postwar Jewish minds even if the works are flawed.

One short chapter cannot begin to cover the multifarious comments, views and problems of Jews and Judaism in the books and films of Roth and Allen. Jewish identity is far and away the dominating subject of scholarship in literary journals and academic conferences, but each new release seems to carry with it some new angle into American Judaism. Roth noted in 1993 that most of the people who had attacked him as an anti-Semite have “mellowed or died off,” so even his books set primarily in Israel, *The Counterlife* and *Operation Shylock*, were published to little controversy (Cooper 255). Since *Deconstructing Harry*, Allen’s films have been relatively inoffensive and rarely make obvious reference to Judaism, and he more often retreats behind the camera rather than acting in front of it, removing the character Americans most associated with New York Jewishness. This chapter and the one previous have outlined the most vocal critiques, but the next will deal with the most sustained and insidious—equating the writer with the written and the actor with the acted.

## V. NARCISSIST CELEBRITY

“My one regret in life is that I’m not someone else.”

Woody Allen *Getting Even*

"I write fiction and I'm told it's autobiography. I write autobiography and I'm told it's fiction, so since I'm so dim and they're so smart, let them decide."

Philip Roth *Deception*

Reading against the grain of fiction to find autobiography and imagining an off-screen personality to resonate with the celebrity persona are mistakes that have resulted in a certain amount of unpleasantness for artists. From awkward interview questions to full-page tabloid spreads, this natural yet wrongheaded approach to art has disproportionately affected Allen and Roth among 20<sup>th</sup>-century artists due primarily to the star-making scandals their work and their personal lives have generated. Because of their unlikely status as celebrities, the books and films they produce are often not allowed to stand on their own with the public’s insistence that life must imitate art—that Roth *is* Portnoy or Zuckerman and Allen *is* Isaac or Alvy. What marks them as different in handling celebrity is their willingness to directly face it in subsequent fictions through impersonations and exaggerations of themselves, further blurring the line between creators and created. This chapter will analyze some these instances of ambiguous truth and purported autobiography while also making use of the paraliterary and paracinematic side of art through interviews, book covers, and other press campaigns all work toward sculpting the personae of the two artists.

Both Woody Allen and Philip Roth are “in” their works to varying degrees, and it is easy to understand how their work is frequently labeled autobiographical. Allen literally is an actor in most of his films, playing a character that changes very little from romantic comedy to murder mystery, and his appearance and mannerisms are instantly recognizable in popular culture whether or not one has seen his films or read his books. Nearly all of his protagonists live in or were raised in New York City with an obviously Jewish upbringing. Allen himself was born into a Yiddish speaking family in Brooklyn and made frequent trips to Manhattan to see films and admire the animated city—“an *explosion* of everything that you only knew from Hollywood movies” (Lax 37). The protagonists are, like Allen, artists of all kinds—playwrights, novelists, movie directors, documentary filmmakers—and (by necessity) age with their creator over the years. Similarly, Roth does not, according to reviewers, make characters, but rather alter egos—writers (usually) from Newark (always) who obsess over sex, death, and work. They have ex-wives and past novels that line up chronologically and thematically with Roth’s and sometimes even have physical features matching the author’s photograph on the back of the dust jacket. In three novels, this protagonist is named Philip Roth, though the plots involving undercover Mossad missions and American pogroms are not likely to appear in the author’s biography, but these recognizable characters find themselves caught up in plots and facing problems that their respective authors have encountered or are currently experiencing within the public eye.

Ultimately, though, by the artists’ own opinions, this straight autobiographical reading is inaccurate and fails as a lens to discover the intricacies of the work. Allen explains, “People think the fictional person I’ve created is me. It isn’t. It just talks like me



and dresses like me, that's really what it is" (Lax 150). Roth goes further and says that to label books like his "'autobiographical' or 'confessional' is not only to falsify their suppositional nature but, if I may say so, to slight whatever artfulness leads some readers to think that they must be autobiographical" ("Ghosts" 122). His true autobiography, he says, would amount to little more than a man staring at a typewriter and would "make Beckett's *The Unnamable* read like Dickens" ("Ghosts" 121). Critics and readers who preoccupy themselves primarily with this link between fact and fiction deny the creativity and imagination of Roth and Allen, fastening them into a limited area of narrow experience. They also must deliberately overlook the dynamic, differing protagonists from work to work that superficial details like birthplace, gender, and ethnicity fail to encapsulate as individual, round characters.

Rather, these commonalities between creator and character allow for what both Roth and Allen in interviews call "impersonation," a concept similar to Judith Butler's theory of gender and sexuality, Performativity. This theory considers expressions of identity as "a *corporeal style*, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative" (Butler 521-2). Gender, sexuality, religion and ethnicity are roles one assumes to avoid the punishments that come from failing to adhere to those accepted roles. The act of impersonation, on the other hand, is the self-aware act of performing somebody else's role and, ideally, dissolving the true self inside of it. Comedians, actors and other impersonators go to such extraordinary lengths to conceal themselves that, paradoxically, the best do not register in their audience's mind as impersonators but instead commingle their real identity with that which they are impersonating. This is the case with Roth and Allen. The labels discussed in previous chapters that are given to

characters within the books or films—like self-hating Jew and misogynist—are nearly as often applied to the artists themselves with no more than an assertion that impersonator and impersonated are one in the same. The performances of these labels exist within a historical context and amount to “cultural fictions” fueled by a “tacit collective agreement to perform” in order to avoid punishments resulting from failing to adhere to these fictions (Butler 522).

Allen and Roth were raised in a Jewish, patriarchal family system that encouraged an interest in girls, but that does not necessarily mean that Alexander Portnoy or Leonard Zelig, two eponymous protagonists, must represent a reflection of that upbringing. Portnoy’s behavior, for example, is a comical exaggeration of “healthy” sexual feelings, and Roth’s background is only a springboard into literary fancy that “provides something against which to measure what you make up” (“Talk” 103). Zelig, Allen’s Jewish chameleon, similarly takes the performance of Jewish paranoia and assimilation to unbelievable extremes that audiences would never confuse for reality, but the underlying subtext of the performance still puts a question in the viewer’s mind; it is not that which is so often posed to Roth (“Did that really happen?”), but rather one that is equally fallacious and perhaps more complicated to answer: “Is that really you?”

One way to address the relationship between Allen and Roth, their characters, their audiences, and popular culture at large is through film theorist Christine Geraghty’s rethinking of stardom that delineates three distinct categories of stars: the celebrity, the professional, and the performer. Her essay, “Re-examining Stardom,” uses the movie star to illustrate her theory, but it is equally apt in discussing literary or any other public figure who has some relationship to popular culture. The *celebrity* is “someone whose

fame rests overwhelmingly on what happens outside the sphere of their [sic] work” (187) and is better known by his or her private life (Britney Spears, Paris Hilton). Their work is only incidental when set against their life, and they are often marked by scandals or controversies. The *professional*, on the other hand, is a star whose work and private life are identical in the public mind and therefore has a body of work marked by a certain level of consistency (Jim Carrey in comedy, Sylvester Stallone in action). As in Jim Carrey’s case when he attempted to act in dramatic films, professionals often have a difficult time breaking out of the particular, familiar role, not because of their abilities, but because of the public’s perception of their talent and personality. Often, they are described as “playing themselves.” The final category, the *performer*, is someone who is “associated with work and the public element of the star duality rather than the private life of the celebrity” (187). The private lives of these men and women are not necessarily unknown to the general public, but it is separate from the body of work shaped by the talent and creativity of the performer. It goes without saying that most artists would like to be in this final category, and based on their own comments, Roth and Allen feel as though this is where they belong. Though this might be the opinion of the artists themselves, audiences are free to read or misread the texts however they would like, and over the years, Roth and Allen have been unwillingly turned into celebrities and professionals while still attempting to function as performers through their art.

Roth started his career as a small-scale *cause célèbre* when *Goodbye Columbus* was criticized for being anti-Semitic, but this minor notoriety was dwarfed a decade later with the release of *Portnoy’s Complaint*. “To become a celebrity is to become a brand name,” Roth said in 1981, “There is Ivory soap, Rice Krispies, and Philip Roth. Ivory is

the soap that floats; Rice Krispies the breakfast cereal that goes snap-crackle-pop; Philip Roth the Jew who masturbates with a piece of liver. And makes a million out of it” (“Ghosts” 120). In an article titled “Imagining Jews” written for *The New York Review of Books* and later reprinted in *Reading Myself and Others*, Roth recalls tidbits of gossip he was made aware of by friends and legal counselors while hiding out at the Yaddo retreat for artists in Saratoga Springs, such as writer Jacqueline Susann’s comment on *The Tonight Show* that she would “like to meet me but didn’t want to shake my hand” and the persistent rumor that he and Barbara Streisand had a “fiery romance” (*Reading* 217). Strangest of all was the widely repeated report that he had suffered a nervous breakdown and had been committed to an insane asylum—the natural outcome, the public reasoned, for the writer of such a book. These rumors, only a fraction of the public chatter surrounding Roth’s private life, clearly placed him in Geraghty’s category of celebrity in the public mind despite the fact that more people bought his book than any other in 1969 and, therefore, *should* know Roth for his creative work and not his public life. Roth accounts for this disparity with a pessimistic estimation of the number of *Portnoy* owners who actually made it through the 274 pages, and he is even more doubtful when predicting the number of those readers who read it intelligently and carefully. Presumably, a large segment of the American public approached the book with the same expectations and motives as future playwright Donald Margulies, though it’s doubtful they came to the same conclusions:

I was 15 when I first read ‘Portnoy’s Complaint’ and for all the wrong reasons; I was scanning for tales of sexy shiksas, but what I found were stunning insights into what it meant to be a Jew and a man. [. . .] He

opened a window for me and let fresh air into a stuffy Brooklyn apartment. (Cooper 108)

To most people, it was a dirty book to be morally condemned...but not before checking to make sure, not unlike the reception of Bernardo Bertolucci's film *Last Tango in Paris*, released three years later, which was proclaimed pornographic from the pulpits but still had spectators standing in line for hours in the first few months of its release.

After *Portnoy's Complaint*, critics and the American public were intensely interested in Roth's subsequent work but were mostly disappointed or nonplussed by what followed. There were still Jews and they still had sex, but the books (*Our Gang*, *The Breast*, and *The Great American Novel*) did not inspire the same public or critical zeal as the 1969 bestseller. As his standing as celebrity faded, that of the professional began to take hold, and critics were able, before long, to identify what they considered to be the Philip Roth style. This style included a specific type of character exploring designated categories of themes in a funny and entertaining way. Ironically, this style was determined from only the one book! Martin Amis, for instance, describes the novels following *Portnoy's Complaint* as

comic in shape, but contrary to our wishes, only glancingly comic in execution. Looking on with expressions of strained indulgence, we allowed Roth this holiday, and calmly waited for the comic genius to resume his obligations. Next came *My Life as a Man* and *The Professor of Desire*, two novels that, it was widely felt, were not funny enough. And where did Roth get off, not being funny enough? We wanted the old get up and go. (290)

Though his mock outrage is partially ironic, his tone is harmonious with a number of critics who felt they were capable of directing the misguided author towards that Philip Roth style. The introduction of Nathan Zuckerman as protagonist and purported alter ego gave rise to an even more entrenched critical assumption that Roth was playing the professional by playing himself. The novels in the Zuckerman series were well reviewed but left many critics wondering why they should care about the life of a man so different from themselves. Again, Amis argues a representative point: “Reading about his life has satisfactions analogous to reading about one’s own. [ . . . ] *Zuckerman Unbound* is life all right. But is it literature?” (289). Critics exploring the relationship between Roth and his literary creations were soon agog over *Deception*, *Operation Shylock*, and *The Plot Against America*, three books clearly marked fiction yet boasting a protagonist named Philip or Philip Roth. Over the years, the celebrity element of Roth’s initial successes were diluted by the more sober fictions of the ‘70s and ‘80s and eventually led to the ingrained status of Roth as professional. In the last few decades, though, Zuckerman has moved to the margins by chronicling the lives of other fictional beings in the American Trilogy, and protagonists of the non-Zuckerman books are actors, painters, and camp counselors instead of the inevitable writer that led many readers and critics to start with the assumption of autobiography.

Allen’s wanderings between Geraghty’s star designations are, when compared to Roth’s, inverted. His career, beginning with standup comedy and then films intimately reflecting that form of performance, was dependent upon the audience members’ feelings towards the comedian’s persona, which was then also attributed to the actor. The off-screen appearance of this dour, brainy-looking schlemiel physically resonated with the

onstage or onscreen performance, making Allen less able to partition off his personality from his persona than comedians like Groucho Marx who could wipe off his mustache or Charles Chaplin who could stow his cap and cane. *Time Magazine* film critic Richard Schickel, who saw early that the viewer's opinion of Allen's persona would be inextricably linked with that of his films, said of *Take the Money and Run*, "It asks only that we like Woody Allen" (Hirsch 61). Vivian Gornick, the critic who challenged both Allen and Roth on their representation of women, admitted that when she visited Allen, "I expected to find him living in one room and eating tuna fish out of a can" but was shocked into reality when she visited his upscale penthouse apartment (Meade 13).

Another factor that plays into the public's confusion of Allen's roles is the self-professed ignorance of acting methods that has limited him to two character types—"An intellectual type, because I wear glasses, and a lowlife because that's what I am" (*Woody*). Because he has not been able to play a wide range of characters that would disperse public perception over a diverse array of roles, to most people, he plays himself. One telltale marker of the professional is the resistance or indifference from supporters the artist must face when changing style or subject. *Interiors*, coming after a dozen unambiguously comic films, was Allen's first film without jokes and was only possible because *Annie Hall* and other successful films gave him the clout with his studio to take a risk. The film eventually made back its 10 million dollar budget and had its staunch supporters, but a major portion of the audience and even reviewers paid attention to the film only because of their appreciation for his comedies. Vincent Canby had trouble forgetting Allen's comic roots saying that while he admired "the sheer, headlong courage of this great, comic, film-making philosopher, I haven't any real idea what the film is up to. It's almost

as if Mr. Allen had set out to make someone else's movie.” The words “pretentious” or “self-indulgent” cropped up in a number of negative reviews and, presumably, the mouths of disappointed patrons, and the reason for these accusations could be tied to the reviewers’ understanding of Allen’s role as entertainer. Working solely as writer and director to make a “serious” film, as he would again in *September, Another Woman*, *Match Point*, and *Cassandra’s Dream*, removed the Allen persona, the element of his work many people identify with strongest, and chipped away at his status as professional.

Allen’s reputation as a performer (he would probably settle once again for professional) was irreparably damaged by scandal as illustrated by his well-publicized suit against American Apparel. In May of 2009, the clothing company awarded Allen \$5 million in a settlement over the unauthorized use of his image on two billboards in New York and Los Angeles to promote their product. Allen, who does not normally do advertisement or promotion, sued for \$10 million. Rather than arguing their case with legal procedures, American Apparel responded that, “Allen’s likeness isn’t worth \$10 million because a sex scandal had tarnished his reputation” (Hughes). The company announced that they would call Allen’s ex-partner Mia Farrow as a witness and requested private documents that would reconstruct Allen’s affair with Soon-Yi Previn. The judge disallowed this unusual defense and the clothing company was forced to settle the day the trial was set to begin, but this incident illustrates the continued shift in Allen’s relationship with the public after the discovery in 1992 of his affair with Farrow’s adopted daughter and their subsequent marriage in 1997. Farrow’s further accusations of child abuse, especially after the release of her memoir *What Falls Away*, left a lingering suspicion of criminality extending beyond his morally questionable behavior. The



necessity that the public *like* Allen's public persona, as Richard Schickel mentioned above, led to poor box office returns and presents a continued difficulty for Allen to finance his projects, a problem that has led him in recent years to Europe and Hollywood for investments and good will.

Though the shifting public reception of their work and role as celebrity "brand names" is interesting in itself, the remainder of this chapter will deal with Allen and Roth's artistic responses within their works and through their personae to their three-part role as, alternatively or simultaneously, celebrity, professional, and performer. First, I'll take up celebrity. For his part, Allen has largely not responded in his work to this new and eager interest in his biography as he continues a long tradition of (mostly) ignoring his reviews and articles, but he has seemed tentatively interested in improving his image in the wake of scandal through other methods of public relations. When asked about his marriage, he answers simply and directly as if it had never been a source of controversy and does not seem to mind any more than in the past when photographers stalk Previn and him. He has invited gossip and sneers by making three films with the young actress Scarlett Johansson, and in 2009 he took his theme of love between older men and younger women to a new extreme in *Whatever Works*, featuring 21-year old Evan Rachel Wood and 61-year old Larry David in a romantic relationship. The ramifications of celebrity do not seem to have affected his work due to his insulated and, perhaps, oblivious nature. He has, however, attempted to attenuate the ill will and outcry over his marriage by agreeing to be filmed by a documentary crew on a European tour with his jazz band, a decision that would have been unfathomable before the scandal because of his reluctance to open his private life to publicity. Barbara Kopple's film, *Wild Man*

*Blues*, ostensibly sets out to document the tour but functions primarily as a window into the marriage of Allen and Previn, which had recently reengaged the public with the earlier sex scandal. The newlyweds appear about as controversial as an old married couple as they talk ordinarily about the mundane—breakfast, shower drains, work—and very rarely crack jokes or smile. Allen is aware of the disparity between public perception and reality (introducing his wife: “This is Soon-Yi Previn, the notorious Soon-Yi Previn.”) and exploits the opportunity to present his marriage favorably or at least as a normal relationship. He also surprised the audience of the 2002 Academy Awards, a ceremony he famously refused to attend even when *Annie Hall* won four awards, by showing up to introduce a montage of scenes set in New York City. Backstage, he commented, “I didn’t have to present anything. I didn’t have to accept anything. I just had to talk about New York City” (Burr). The popular opinion among Hollywood insiders was that Allen attended the Academy Awards as part of a broader public relations campaign intending to improve his relationship with Hollywood studios while also establishing himself as a more friendly and likable person in order to attract much-needed financial backers (Burr). Outside of this persona adjustment, the films themselves do not seem to have been changed by Allen’s notorious celebrity status.

This attitude of avoidance and ignorance of one’s celebrity is echoed by Nathan Zuckerman in Roth’s *Zuckerman Unbound*, an exploration of the unintended ramifications of a controversial bestselling book. Zuckerman’s mother asks why his book *Carnovsky* has such a negative image of the protagonist’s childhood and what to do about the readers who naturally assume the story is autobiographical. Zuckerman answers, “There’s nothing to do about what people think, except to pay as little attention as

possible” (91). This might be how Zuckerman sees it, but Roth has taken a different path in response to the fame he garnered from *Portnoy*, writing novels and giving interviews directly dealing with celebrity. In a 1977 interview, Roth looks back on the months leading up to *Portnoy*’s publication when he “began to sense that something was wrong. I hadn’t just written a book, it seemed, but had become somebody who stood for something. What I realized was that in the popular imagination, and in the media, Roth and Portnoy were about to be fused into the same person” (“Talk” 102). An article published in these months paints Roth as a “Jew Freak” and spends a great deal of time comparing Roth’s speech and mannerisms to the comic Lenny Bruce. We are never given any evidence of this resemblance through dialogue and Roth politely insists evidence to the contrary, but still we are told that Roth’s “wit is laced with dirty words, [his] eye notices every girl that passes on the street, and [his] ear picks up on every innuendo in a conversation” (“Will” 18). The desire to meet a Portnoy rather than a Tolstoy guides the interviewer to manufacture a misguided narrative evidenced by the headline of another interview: “Should Sane Women Shy Away From Him at Parties?”

In *Zuckerman Unbound* the Nathan Zuckerman is constantly addressed as Carnovsky, the protagonist of Zuckerman’s novel, and asked if he really did everything that he’d written about. Despite his desire to give the public “as little attention as possible,” Zuckerman cannot help but make use of his celebrity on occasion (91). At a party, he meets Caesara O’Shea, a beautiful actress, and escorts her home but must leave immediately to see a literary biographer. After a goodnight kiss, “he watched her disappear into the hotel. If only he *were* Carnovsky. Instead, he would go home and write it all down. Instead of having Caesara, he would have his notes” (107). Deciding

impulsively to impersonate his character, Zuckerman hurries after the woman and asks if she would like to stay out with him. She accepts and asks to be taken where all the notorious writers go. “The New York Public Library?” he asks, “At this hour?” (107). Zuckerman, like Roth’s own public persona, is caught between the self disciplined, structured life of a writer and the impulsive, exaggerated life of his subjects. Readers can sort through this contradiction only after they acknowledge the impersonation and performance taking place on multiple levels of the narrative. Like a method actor, Roth is easily recognizable in his characters’ biographies (appearance, profession, location), but the transformation and disappearance into his part is so complete that author and subject become seemingly inseparable. The uncomplicated assumption of autobiography, however, is false. Though the details of character line up, Roth is imagining the wild aftermath of *Carnovsky* just as he had to imagine from his seclusion in Saratoga Springs what was happening in New York City after *Portnoy’s Complaint*’s release. This is true of most of Roth’s pseudo-autobiographical works; they start with a well publicized fact like the controversy of his book’s release or the breakup with his wife Claire Bloom and from there enters the world of supposition, exaggeration, and outright invention. *The Plot Against America* is the clearest example of this creative process as its genre, alternate history, unabashedly announces its speculative nature, but Roth claims to have never been more honest in his representation of his childhood. In a *New York Times* essay that accompanied the book’s release, Roth wrote that he set out to “alter the historical reality by making Lindbergh America’s 33rd president while keeping everything else as close to factual truth as I could” (“Story”). That Roth *created* this altered history, country, and family in *The Plot Against America* is enough to earn the book the respect of directly

engaging with it on its own terms without the hindrance of outside and inessential facts. With varying degrees of success, scholars have attempted to find the line partitioning reality and fantasy, but these investigations and others that take the reader outside of the text ultimately fail at opening up new methods of inquiry and manage only to mire the creativity in gossip and biography.

As professionals, those artists pigeonholed into one category or style, Roth and Allen have been constricted and misunderstood owing to both the biographical fallacy and the disposition of critics to dictate what kind of books and films the artists *should* be making. Roth responded to the latter suggestions by repeatedly switching the styles, tones, and genres he worked within even while using repeated characters or situations. This restless dexterity allowing him to avoid being pinned down annoyed and occasionally enraged his readership leading to his most famous public disavowal by Irving Howe in the *Commentary* article “Philip Roth Reconsidered.” An early supporter of Roth, Howe lamented the author’s “souring muse” and withdrew his earlier support and predictions of greatness, ultimately swayed by the argument that Roth was a self-hating Jew. The critical shift was important enough to warrant inclusion in *The Anatomy Lesson* where Zuckerman responds to similar accusations by commandeering the critic’s name and impersonating a pornographer to all who will listen. Commercially, Roth’s 1990 publisher of *Deception*, Simon & Schuster, tried to profit from the public image of Roth as a writer of dirty books by attempting to manufacture a level of controversy analogous to *Portnoy’s Complaint*. The original hardcover copy features a reclining nude woman on the dust jacket cover with a quotation announcing “Roth’s most provocative novel about the erotic life since *Portnoy’s Complaint*,” despite the fact that *Deception* is

constructed entirely from dialogue and features no explicit sex scenes. Roth repeatedly returns to the subject of sex, but this marketing strategy more common to Harlequin romance than literary fiction proves ineffective in accurately branding his novels.

Even more than Roth, Woody Allen has been plagued by audience hostility towards a changing body of work. The obvious example is *Interiors*. Reviewers are more sympathetic in hindsight, but Allen notes that at the time, “people were so shocked and so disappointed with me that I broke my contract with them, my implicit deal with them” (Bjorkman 95). These critiques are amplified and dramatized in Allen’s 1980 film *Stardust Memories* about a comic film director who would like to switch to making dramatic films. Robert Stam points out that this film suffered from the traditional Allen/Roth misreading of straight autobiography but, additionally, because the film made light of film critics, was also poorly reviewed: “Critics misconstrue an aesthetic question—the quality of the film—with a psychoanalytic question: Why did this film please or displease *me*?” (165). In the movie, director Sandy Bates (played by Allen) must attend to a constant flow of fans, critics, producers, and extraterrestrial beings who all insist that his earlier comedies are far superior to his new dramas. Allen is exploring the conflict between artistic integrity and public showmanship—or, to use Geraghty’s terms, the star performer and the star professional. At one point, Bates questions the entire idea of making art in an impermanent world when he asks a group of super-intelligent space beings (most of the film takes place in the protagonist’s mind), “If nothing lasts, why am I bothering to make films, or do anything, for that matter?” Keeping with the typical responses, the aliens dismiss the question and reply, “We enjoy your films. Particularly the early funny ones.” They go on to say, “Incidentally, you’re

also not Superman, you're a comedian. You want to do mankind a real service? Tell funnier jokes." Despite continued real-life, terrestrial resistance, Allen has continued to make dramatic films, including the critically well-received *Match Point* in 2004, the first Woody Allen film to earn a profit in over a decade.

Allen's vocal refusal of celebrity or professional status while still exploiting the audience's interest in biography, real or fake, is what allowed for his continued ability to make films with the level of autonomy and creative control he enjoyed until his audience reevaluated him post-Previn. One cannot say that Philip Roth has ignored these attempts at *celebritizing* and *professionalizing* (he's actually made quite a nice living off them), but they amount to little more than fodder for his fictionalized examinations of artistic production and the Jewish American character. As long as artists use the word "I," a certain segment of the public will continue to fictionalize the creator and read their creations autobiographically, but after Roth and Allen have faded from the celebrity scene and their scandalous biographies are obscured by time, their work will remain for continued public interest and scholarly attention.

Despite my ambivalence concerning biography's application to academic analysis, I cannot let a chapter on celebrity pass without briefly laying out the curious personal intersection between Allen and Roth and the direct bearing it had on their subsequent work. Equal parts gossip and inspiration (though not in a positive way) Allen and Roth have had a few indirect encounters that became the genesis of two future characters, one large and one small. The earliest mention of one artist by the other came in a 1976 interview when Allen responded to a question about Roth without a trace of irony that he liked the books but couldn't connect to the characters because "I don't have

that Jewish obsession [. . .] and I never had that obsession with Gentile women” (Kelley 24). Humorous in 1976, the year he finished *Annie Hall*, this sentiment would be repeated four decades later to another surprised interviewer after *Zelig*, *Oedipus Wrecks*, *Deconstructing Harry*, and other films featuring self-consciously Jewish protagonists obsessed with Gentile women. In the latter interview, Allen added, “It’s hard for me to talk about Philip Roth” (Bjorkman 324).

Marion Meade, in her unsympathetic biography of Allen, quotes Rafael Navarro, a friend of Claire Bloom as saying, “Roth always detested Woody because of the sentimentality and the vulgarity. The thing about Philip is that he has exquisite taste because he knows when he is being vulgar” (307). Navarro goes on to say that Roth was suspicious of Allen for allegedly plagiarizing his material and later was “full of thunder” after the Soon-Yi Previn affair became public. A few years later, in 1995, Roth’s own marriage to Bloom ended in divorce after propositioning a friend of Bloom’s daughter (“a virtually incestuous betrayal” with a girl “practically a daughter to me”) and he began dating his Connecticut next-door neighbor, Mia Farrow (Bloom 225). Roth and Farrow both guard their private lives against probing questions and media spotlight, but as late as 2006 Farrow responded to a question concerning “the men in her life” and the possibility of remarriage by saying, “I know it’s a cliché but we’re good friends. He’s a neighbor and a friend and he’s been a good friend. Whether I’ll marry again, I don’t know” (“My”).

In 1997, Fine Line Features released Allen’s *Deconstructing Harry* and filmgoers and movie reviewers, newly reminded of the director’s faults by Farrow’s recently published memoir, were convinced it was the most autobiographical film in Allen’s extensive canon. Their revised perception of Allen as a lascivious old man fit with the



onscreen character (markedly different from the normal Allen persona) who paid hookers for sex, swore like a sailor, and created “thinly disguised versions” of himself as protagonists for his often smutty stories, and for the most part, critics applauded him for his apparent courage and artistic integrity: “Like the man almost said,” Janet Maslin quipped, modifying the well known Allen quote, “the art wants what it wants” (Maslin). Even though he received these qualified compliments for the film, Allen seemed especially uncomfortable being associated with the role of Harry and offered the role to at least four other actors before reluctantly playing it himself (Girgus 151). Later, he laid out the character disparities to Stig Björkman: “I am not a writer who’s ever had writer’s block. I don’t sit at home and drink alcohol. I don’t have women visiting my house. I don’t have all these turbulent marriages. [. . .] It’s just not me” (324). A smaller segment of critics, including Roger Ebert and *Slate*’s David Edelstein, accepted this argument and went on to make one of their own: Harry isn’t Woody Allen; he is Philip Roth. As I have been arguing, the distinction is subtler than it initially seems, and it is probably more accurate to say that Harry is the exaggerated Nathan Zuckerman or the equally embellished Philip Roth portrayed in Claire Bloom’s memoir published one year earlier.

Harry is accused, in the familiar critical triumvirate, of being a self-hating Jew, a misogynist, and a narcissistic exploiter of his autobiography. In the first scene featuring Allen, Harry is confronted by an armed ex-lover, Lucy, who accuses him of ruining her life with her husband by exposing a past affair in his latest novel. When Harry protests that he did all he could to disguise her, she responds, “Of course you made a few stupid exaggerations or, as the critics say, ‘Inspired comic flights.’” These flights of fancy appear to be cosmetic in nature. For instance, he adds one letter to disguise the real

“Jane” as the fictional “Janet” but still manages to get confused when he calls Lucy by her fictional name, “Leslie.” “Lucy!” she cries, “I’m Lucy, motherfucker! Not Leslie! Except of course, I am Leslie.” Harry tries to calm her by saying, “Hey, gimme a break. I’m the one who ended up in Bellevue,” an allusion to Roth’s mental breakdown and subsequent hospitalization detailed in Bloom’s memoir. Additionally, Harry has a fictional alter ego, Ken, (as Roth has Zuckerman and Zuckerman has Carnovsky) who lives an exaggerated version of Harry’s life and even encounters his creator to berate him for his real-life choices (à la Zuckerman’s postscript in *The Facts*). The part of Ken is played by Richard Benjamin, a strange choice considering he had not appeared in a major Hollywood film for close to three decades, except for the fact that his two defining roles came as Neil Klugman and Alexander Portnoy in the adaptations of *Goodbye Columbus* (1969) and, of course, *Portnoy’s Complaint* (1972).

Throughout the film, Harry earns his place as Allen’s most vocally misogynistic character by, among other things, calling his old girlfriend a “world class *meshugina* cunt” and sleeping with a patient of his therapist ex-wife. “I’m always thinking of fucking every woman I meet,” he admits to his therapist just before being reproached by yet another ex-wife for teaching their nine-year-old son the words “banging” and “beaver.” Echoing Zuckerman’s brother in *The Counterlife*, Harry’s sister is a recent convert to Zionism, and he stops by her house long enough to call her fanatical and in turn be accused of “nihilism, cynicism, sarcasm and orgasm,” a slogan, he tells her, that he could run on in France. The initial audience assumption of autobiography in *Deconstructing Harry* is not too far off the mark as Allen has faced these accusations over the years, but the many details pointing to Roth’s biography and bibliography

ultimately makes a more convincing case. The film ends with a surprisingly sympathetic look at Harry's problems. After alienating nearly everyone he has come in contact with, he dreams that his fictional characters have gathered together to honor him with a standing ovation. Harry smiles and muses, "A character who's too neurotic to function in life and can only function in art..." The sentiment inspires him and, upon waking, he begins notes for a new novel: "All people know the same truth. Our lives consist of how we choose to distort it. Only his writing was calm. His writing, which had in more ways than one, saved his life."

Roth has been known to settle scores and attack critics through his fiction as with *I Married a Communist*, his prompt response to Bloom's memoir, and *The Anatomy Lesson*, a delayed reaction to Howe's "Philip Roth Reconsidered." Roth rarely admits to literal connections between characters and real people, but he seems to have belatedly answered Allen's characterization of Harry Block with an invented character of his own. *The Humbling*, a short novel about an actor who has lost control of his craft, involves a short scene in a psychiatric hospital where the protagonist, Simon Axler, meets an "elfin, pale-skinned" woman "with the bony frailty of a sickly girl" named Sybil Van Buren (19). Night after night, she recounts the grisly details of what put her in the hospital:

I went off to go shopping for groceries. [. . .] I'd left my daughter playing out back in the yard and our little boy upstairs sleeping in his crib and my rich and powerful second husband watching a golf tournament on TV. I turned around and came home because when I got to the supermarket I realized I'd forgotten my wallet. [. . .] [I]n the living room the golf game was still going, but my eight-year-old daughter, my little Alison, was

sitting up on the sofa without her underpants and my rich and powerful second husband was kneeling on the floor, his head between her plump little legs. (20-21)

Compare this literary passage with a short section from Mia Farrow's book:

While Casey and I had been out shopping, Alison [the babysitter] had gone to the television room, looking for one of the [ . . . ] children. She saw Dylan [Farrow and Allen's adopted seven-year-old daughter] 'sitting on the couch, staring straight ahead with a blank expression.' Woody was kneeling in front of her with his face in her lap. Alison told Casey she was 'shocked,' because it seemed 'intimate, something you'd say, Oops, excuse me, if both had been adults.' I remembered that Dylan had not been wearing underpants. (299)

It's difficult to imagine Roth not being aware of this passage, as he and Farrow were dating at the time of its composition. Marion Meade even goes as far as saying that Roth contributed to the book editorially and creatively, although having read the memoir, I can't say that I saw a sentence with which Roth could be associated. The passages parallel one another in many respects, including the grocery store errand that takes the women out of the house, the eyes-forward expressions on the young girls' faces, and the narrators' sudden realizations that the children are not wearing underwear. Even the uncommon spelling of "Alison" is echoed in the novel. Following the nonfiction account, the wealthy, prominent husband in *The Humbling* is stepfather to the daughter but biological father to son, and both passages go on to draw attention to the two mothers' dangerous passivity that led to the alleged abuse. Sybil, instead of calling the police, goes

to her room and attempts to kill herself, leaving her two children alone with the abusive husband. Farrow, too, was criticized for not protecting her children when she continued to maintain a professional and social relationship with Allen well after the discovery of the pornographic Soon-Yi Polaroids and attempted to protect his reputation even after Dylan's testimony. The psychiatric hospital from which Sybil tells her story is not far off the mark from where Farrow would have ended up had Allen gotten his way. In the lawsuit he filed against her, he claimed,

Respondent [Farrow] has been, and presently is, emotionally disturbed and is under constant heavy medication. [. . .] The Children are in great fear of the Respondent by reason of her emotional instability and abusive conduct. Respondent's past and present actions have created great emotional distress for The Children, which has necessitated psychiatric intervention. (*What* 303)

Additionally, the investigators who supported Allen's custody claims overstepped their professional bounds and recommended that Farrow seek psychiatric help. Sybil asks Simon if he would kill her husband, and after he refuses, she becomes the murderer herself. When Simon asks Sybil's sister why she did not contact the police about the abuse instead of resorting to violence, she answers precisely as Farrow answered, "He wasn't a nobody and the case would wind up in the papers and on TV and Alison would get dragged into a courtroom nightmare to be exposed to yet more horror" (*Humbling* 104). To Simon Axler, Sybil's violence is a "benchmark of courage" (139) and inspires him to do what he has been trying to do throughout the entire narrative, commit suicide.

While Mia Farrow did not lead to the death of either man, the relatively minor incident within *The Humbling* appears to be Roth's reply to Allen's *Deconstructing Harry*, treatment of Farrow after the breakup, and years of perceived thematic plagiarism. The Allen and Farrow characters are not necessarily more disguised than his fictional caricatures of Claire Bloom or Irving Howe, but they belong to a less well-known episode in Roth's biography and, thus, have not been commented upon. The coded battle in *Harry* and *The Humbling* is waged on a more private plane and provides insight into the often-contentious dialogue between these two artists' texts.

## VI. CONCLUSION

“Don’t shoot! I am a serious writer!”

Philip Roth *Zuckerman Unbound*

“If you want to shoot me, shoot me! I was working! You interrupted me!”

Woody Allen *Deconstructing Harry*

Considering the caustic reviews and critical public barbs that have put Allen and Roth under attack through much of their careers, it is astonishing that the two artists continue to work as prolifically as ever even into their late seventies. The three specific critiques explored in these chapters (one cogent, one not, and the last dependent on the critic’s intention) point not only to the problems academics set out to resolve, but also to the obsessions manifested in the films and novels. The relationship between men and women, the ambiguous identity of postwar Jewish Americans, and the unsettled line between fiction and reality are all themes evident in Roth’s very first stories and Allen’s early standup routines, and they remain persistent preoccupations in the most recent work. The academics and critics who recognize and analyze these themes along with the general public will exercise some control over if and how Allen and Roth are remembered, but it is the contemporary and future writers and filmmakers who will ultimately decide what to carry forward or leave behind through their own work.

Allen and Roth, as usual, are pessimistic about their legacy. “I’ve been making films since 1967,” Allen told *Time Magazine*, “and I’ve never felt I’ve influenced anybody in any way. [. . .] I never see young people that I’ve influenced either as a

personality or as a filmmaker” (“Ten”). Roth does not believe that his work will live on after his death or, even more cynically, that the novel as an art form will exist within a quarter century. He further revised his prediction to Tina Brown, saying, “I was being optimistic about 25 years really. I think it's going to be cultic. I think always people will be reading them but it will be a small group of people. Maybe more people than now read Latin poetry, but somewhere in that range.” Charles Foran called Roth’s final Zuckerman book *Exit Ghost*, “a literary stage exit and a cultural funeral,” and interprets its message in Twainian fashion: “Saul Bellow is dead, so is Norman Mailer. And I’m not feeling very well myself.” Allen and Roth may be some of the last representatives of the so-called Golden Age of Jewish American art, but they have probably misjudged their lasting influence upon literary and cinematic history. David Brauner has pointed out how Jonathan Safran Foer’s early career closely mirrors Roth’s and that some of Foer’s narrative strategies, like using his own name and identity as a fictional protagonist, borrow from later Roth (186). The disjointed, bittersweet breakup dramedy Allen pioneered has become a popular genre in itself with diverse films from Marc Webb’s comedy (500) *Days of Summer* to Derek Cianfrance’s drama *Blue Valentine* falling inescapably under *Annie Hall*’s influence. Also, though Allen and Roth have worked for over five decades, serious critical interest began relatively late in their careers because a portion of academia considered their work unserious or unworthy of intellectual attention. This belated response has left holes in the criticism of early or overlooked stories, novels, and films, so there is an abundance of future work to be done.

Last and most importantly, Woody Allen and Philip Roth continue to work steadily with astonishing control over the technical aspects of their craft—the scenes and



sentences. Book and film reviews, along with the overall material itself, fluctuate, but Allen's strength as a director continues to become more apparent just as Roth's command over the English language has recently salvaged several below-average novels. This persistent talent is responsible for the masterpieces like *American Pastoral* and *Match Point* that are normally unattainable so late in an artist's life. It will be interesting to track their shared themes and artistic kinship as their prolificacy continues and, years from now, find out if they come to occupy adjacent spaces in a revised American cultural canon or continue on parallel, close but never crossing, paths.

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