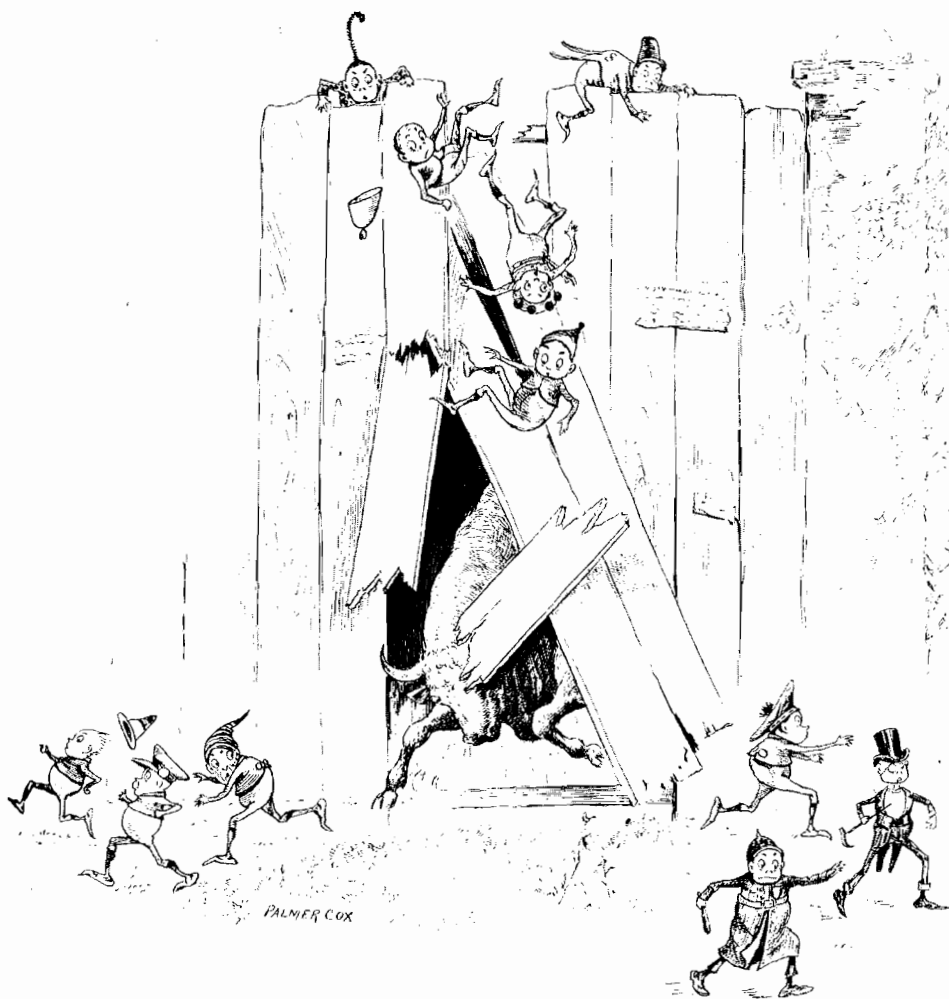


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Moscow Meets Manhattan: The Russian Soul of Woody Allen's Films

BY ELLEN CHANCES

"I don't think I could live beyond a thirty-minute radius of the Russian Tea Room."

— Woody Allen, as quoted in *Gentleman's Quarterly*¹

"But the only questions of real interest are the ultimate questions, otherwise who cares about anything else?"

— Woody Allen
as quoted in Eric Lax, *On Being Funny. Woody Allen and Comedy*²

ON A TRIP TO THE SOVIET UNION DURING THE SUMMER OF 1988, I SAW Woody Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo* in a Moscow movie theater. The movie was dubbed into Russian, with one male voice assuming all the roles. After the film was over, I took an informal viewer survey of members of the audience as they filed out of the theater. I asked why they had come to see the movie. One Moscow woman answered that she had read a translation of a Woody Allen short story—she couldn't remember which one—in a Soviet literary journal. A man stated that he had never heard of Allen, but that he liked coming to any American film. Another declared that although he had not heard of the director, he was struck by the "originality of his vision." My favorite response was that of a young man who admitted, earnestly, that he had thought that *King Kong* was playing (the 1970s American version of *King Kong* was, in fact, playing in the movie theater's other hall), but that he had made a mistake and had seen *Purple Rose of Cairo* instead. The comment was worthy of Woody Allen.

Woody Allen's 1989 film, *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, is a searing indictment of the moral vacuum of American society in the 1980s, a society without ethics or a set of religious principles. The rich TV producer, played by Alan Alda, is successful. He wins society's admiration and, as "hero," he wins the hand of the leading lady. Might makes right; big bucks are best. Woody Allen has dipped into Dostoevsky's Russian literary classic, *Crime and Punishment*, for the backdrop of this film. The film's title is even patterned on *Crime and Punishment* (although the phrase, "crimes and misdemeanors," comes from Dostoevsky's novel, *The Idiot*). In Allen's version of *Crime and Punishment*, there is no punishment for crime, and murder is a misdemeanor as long as one is not caught. Allen, creating his film as a reflection of contemporary American society's values, twists Dostoevsky's plot. For the nineteenth-century Russian writer, it is important for Raskolnikov to suffer, even if the legal authorities never discover that he is guilty of murder. For the murderer in Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, the important thing is not to get caught. Although Allen demonstrates that there are those people who feel pangs of conscience, his dismal message is that present-day American society has little respect for them; society considers those who uphold moral values to be little more than suckers and fools. For Dostoevsky and for Allen, the importance of living according to a set of religious truths is paramount. For Dostoevsky, of course, those truths are based on Russian Orthodox Christianity; for Allen, in *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, the truths are derived from Judaism. Allen's ties, in this film, to nineteenth-century Russian literature, are strong.

Allen's indebtedness to Russian literature, I believe, spans his career. Russian literary roots show even in those later Allen films that seem, at first glance, to have nothing to do with the Russian literary tradition. In this essay, I will



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investigate the explicit and implicit ways in which, it seems to me, Woody Allen's films reflect his appreciation of Russian culture. I present a general overview of Allen's career in the hope that subsequent research on his connections with Russian literature will focus on specific aspects of the works.

Aficionados of Woody Allen's early films and books might have sensed his affinity with the giants of the Russian literary tradition. "Notes from the Overfed (After reading Dostoevski and the new 'Weight Watchers' magazine on the same plane trip)," in Allen's book, *Getting Even*, is a parody of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. Allen's first line, "I am fat,"³ mocks Dostoevsky's opening sentence, "I am a sick man." Allen's playful treatment in "Notes" of the existential nature of fat cells is reminiscent of Dostoevsky's less frivolous concern with the existential nature of life itself.

Allen's movie *Love and Death* takes on Russian and Soviet culture on a grand scale. Its title mimics Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, and its conception was partially inspired by Allen's having seen Soviet director Sergei Bondarchuk's 1967 film version of that novel.⁴ The music in *Love and Death*, the "Lieutenant Kizhi Suite," "Alexander Nevsky," and the "Scythian Suite," is by Sergei Prokofiev, the same composer whose works are heard in Sergei Eisenstein's film masterpieces.⁵ The characters in *Love and Death* bear the names of their distant and not-so-distant relatives from Russian literature. Allen's Boris, cousin Sonya, and a "real-life" Napoleon also inhabit *War and Peace*. Allen's Boris' last name, Grushenko, sounds like Grushenka, the first name of an important figure in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. References to characters in Russian novels and plays skip freely and irreverently through the fields of Allen's cinematic landscape. His mention of Uncle Nikolai recalls Tolstoy's Nikolai in *War and Peace*. When a ring is to be taken to Natasha in Kiev, that novel again comes to mind. The allusion to Dmitri and to two brothers, one of whom is Ivan, recalls the tangled family relationships of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

When Allen's Sonya declares that she is one-half saint and one-half whore, another Sonya, in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, is evoked. Raskolnikov, "who killed two ladies," is mentioned. The names Lev (Tolstoy's first name), Alexei (one of the Karamazov brothers), Tatiana (the heroine of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*), Trigorin (one of the protagonists in Chekhov's *Seagull*), and Myshkin (the "idiot" in Dostoevsky's novel of that name) are mentioned in passing. A nutty dialogue consists solely of the titles of seven Dostoevsky works: *The Brothers Karamazov*, *The Possessed*, *A Raw Youth*, *The Idiot*, *The Insulted and the Injured*, *The Gambler*, and *The Double*. The sequence ends with the words, "How novel."

Similarly, central images from *War and Peace* find a new home in Allen's movie. The shot of the clouds above, near the beginning of *Love and Death*, is remarkably similar to the scene in which the wounded Andrei, gazing at the sky, realizes that his life can be happy and meaningful only if he frees himself from hypocrisy. As Boris is surveying the battle, much in the way that Pierre does in Tolstoy's novel, his glasses, like Pierre's, are shattered. In each case, a "war" episode provides the occasion for a philosophical digression on the virtues of the common people. An opera scene figures prominently in *Love and Death*, and in

War and Peace. As in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, the opera scene is linked with illicit love. As in *War and Peace*, the opera scene sets the stage for the seduction of one of the major characters.

Dostoevskian images parade through Allen's *Love and Death*, too. A "strange and vivid" dream that Boris has brings us straight into the world of *Crime and Punishment*, where Raskolnikov's dreams play such a significant role. In Dostoevsky's novel, Raskolnikov deals with the tormenting question of whether or not he is an extraordinary individual. Allen's Boris realizes, after a dream, that he "wouldn't grow up to be ordinary." As in *Crime and Punishment*, Napoleon is described as a great man. In the novel, Dostoevsky asks whether or not Raskolnikov is a Napoleon, an extraordinary man. In film and novel, the question raised is whether or not violence is justified in order to help humanity. Is it wrong to shoot another human being? Boris, in *Love and Death*, asks himself as he grapples with the issue of murdering Napoleon. As in Dostoevsky's novels, the theme of the double is important. In *Love and Death*, Woody Allen's Boris becomes a double of the so-called "real" Napoleon in the movie.

Allen's movie touches on some of the themes familiar to readers of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. An important part of that novel is the idea that all people must bear responsibility for all other people. Children are responsible for their fathers, Dostoevsky believes. In the Allen film, we are told that all mankind is to be executed for a crime it never committed. *Love and Death's* Sonya, played by Diane Keaton, declares that love is everything. She says that she wants to meet someone with qualities in the three most important realms: intellectual, spiritual, and sensual. One of the key principles infusing *The Brothers Karamazov* is the all-powerful force of love. The Karamazov brothers represent the three characteristics of intellect (Ivan), spirit (Alesha), and feeling (Dmitri).

A powerful section of Dostoevsky's novel focuses on the suffering of innocent children. Ivan Karamazov states that he accepts God, but that given the existence of the suffering of innocent children on earth, he cannot accept God's world. He asks Alesha whether a child's mother should forgive the people who had hurt her child. Allen's movie contains a scene in which the question is asked, "What'll you do when the French rape your sister?" In the typical style of early Woody Allen films, the reply is comic ("I don't have a sister") rather than sober and tragic, as in Dostoevsky's novels.

"Notes from the Overfed" and *Love and Death* are not subtle in the ways in which they call attention to their Russian literary roots. Other humorous Woody Allen films and stories play with Russian culture in a more indirect way, with occasional references. *Bananas*, Allen's early film spoof on Latin American politics, reproduces a scene from Eisenstein's movie, *Potemkin*, in which a baby carriage is shown rolling out of control down the stone stairs of the port of Odessa.

The story "By Destiny Denied," in Allen's collection *Side Effects*,⁶ contains a character, Blanche Mandelstam, whose last name is that of Osip Mandelstam, one of Russia's greatest twentieth-century poets. "Nefarious Times We Live In," a playful piece in the same Allen book, contains the following allusion to Chekhov: "Electroshock therapy at the Veterans Hospital helped although wires got crossed

with a behavioral psychology lab and I along with several chimpanzees all performed 'The Cherry Orchard' together in perfect English."⁷ In Allen's play "God (A Play),"⁸ published in *Without Feathers*, the king decides, in the midst of his conversation with Hepatitis, Diabetes, and a chorus worthy of a Greek tragedy, that he will contact his agent, Sol Myshkin, at the William Morris Agency. Myshkin—with a different first name—is the protagonist of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*.

"The UFO Menace," a story in *Side Effects*, narrates an incident in which a cigar-shaped object seems to be following Sir Chester Ramsbottom's car. It turns out that the object is Sir Chester's nose. "Naturally," writes Allen, "all his evasive actions could not lose it, since it was attached to his face."⁹ Nikolai Gogol's story, "The Nose," has both a man whose nose becomes detached from his face and the nose itself, which (who?) begins to hang out with St. Petersburg high society. Similarly, Allen's "The Shallowest Man," a contribution to the same volume, contains a fleeting reference to the same Gogol story. Koppelman et al. are sitting around in a delicatessen, discussing shallow people they have known. The story ends as Bursky asks, "Who cares what the point of the story is? If it even has a point. It was an entertaining anecdote. Let's order."¹⁰ Gogol's "The Nose" ends as the narrator declares, "But what is even stranger and more incomprehensible than anything is that authors should choose such subjects. I confess that is entirely beyond my comprehension. It's like—no, I simply don't understand it. In the first place, it's of no benefit whatever to our country, and in the second place—but even in the second place there's no benefit whatever. I simply don't know what to make of it..."¹¹ Hidden, or not so hidden, references to "The Nose" also ornament "The Flying Snoll," one of "world literature's more imaginative creations" that constitute Allen's "Fabulous Tales and Mythical Beasts."¹² The Emperor Ho Sin, in part of this tale in *Without Feathers*, looks into a mirror and instead of seeing himself, sees Mandel Goldblatt, a plumber who "accused him of taking his overcoat."¹³ Gogol's "The Nose" contains a scene in which a man looks into a mirror and finds that his nose has disappeared. "The Overcoat," a Gogol story centering on a shallow man whose overcoat is stolen, is, together with "The Nose," one of Gogol's so-called "Petersburg Stories." Allen brings "The Flying Snoll" to an end in this way: "From this Ho Sin learned the secret of life, and it was 'Never to yodel.'"¹⁴ The ending is vintage Woody Allen, with its absurd non-sequiturs; the device is vintage Gogol, with his non-sequitur absurd humor.

Allen's *Sleeper* turns, once again, to Gogol's "The Nose," as the viewer discovers that all that is left of the leader is his nose. In this film, the people who run the anti-utopian "utopia" wish to keep the nose alive for a year and eventually, by the process of cloning, to reproduce the leader from his nose. Woody Allen's character, as a dissident in the ultra-scientific future society, wishes to steal the nose. The nose in Allen's movie is finally crushed by a steamroller. Interspersed throughout *Sleeper* are other details that tie the film to Russian and Soviet culture. A photograph of Stalin makes its appearance. The heavy questions of weighty Russian novels are spoofed. Diane Keaton's character

asks, "Do you believe in God?," whereupon Allen answers, "Do you realize that God spelled backwards is dog?"

The Russian work which *Sleeper* parallels most strikingly is "The Bedbug," a 1928 play by Soviet poet and playwright Vladimir Mayakovsky. In "The Bedbug," a man wakes up, after decades of being frozen, in an anti-utopian "utopian" society where the guiding principle is utter belief in science and rationality. The scene of the awakening of the dissident soul from an earlier time is very much alike in the two works. Another repeated theme is the abhorrence with which the new society regards the irrational, unpredictable concept of love in the old society.

With Woody Allen's increasing melding of comic and serious elements in his films, the direct parallels to works of Russian literature continue, but often not in such an obvious way. Often, the films are examples of "laughter through tears," the term that Vissarion Belinsky, a nineteenth-century Russian radical, used in referring to Gogol's works. Much more important is the infusion, in Allen's films of the last decade or so, of the significant questions that propel the best of Russian literary masterpieces. Sometimes the questions that are raised in the films, though they do not issue directly from the Russian tradition, bear its imprint. (Allen has discussed his great interest in the Russians, and in Western European and American literature and culture—Kafka, Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Emily Dickinson, the films of Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini—as well as in American film comedians such as Bob Hope, the Marx Brothers, Buster Keaton, and Charlie Chaplin.)¹⁵ The substantive concerns are those that touch people in the United States, Allen's own country, in its late twentieth-century unfolding. However, the search for answers to the questions about what makes life worth living is the same arduous quest that Russian literary heroes and heroines undertake.

Allen's film classic, *Annie Hall* (1977), is a tender, funny, painful love story. It also has deeper implications in its indictment of contemporary America's love of the superficial. The embodiment of a shallow life is the easy California existence to which Tony Roberts turns. He has rejected his former life as a serious actor in New York City's Shakespeare in Central Park series. He prefers his new role as a Los Angeles television comedian whose situation comedy gets instant laughs by his addition of canned laughter to the program's sound track. Alvy, played by Woody Allen, points out the falsity of his friend's new life. A man at a glitzy West Coast party announces that *Grand Illusion* is a great movie if you are high. Alvy's response to the proponents of flabby living is, "It's important to make a little effort once in a while." The movie's title is derived from "anhedonia," the psychological term that describes an inability to experience pleasure. In addition to documenting Annie's and Alvy's love affair, *Annie Hall* grapples with the implications of the two extremes of attitudes toward life, the ultimately hedonistic and the quintessentially anhedonistic.

Allen's first foray into serious drama, *Interiors* (1978), seems to be played out against the background of the icy starkness of Ingmar Bergman's Scandinavian psyches and the Eugene O'Neill-like "Long Day's Journey into Night" tragedy

of a mother shrouded in a fog of insanity. At the same time, the film reaches back to Anton Chekhov's plays; focusing on three sisters, it is reminiscent of Chekhov's play, "Three Sisters." In typical Chekhov fashion, *Interiors* emphasizes people's inability to communicate with one another. Responding to comments that draw parallels between *Interiors* and Bergman's films, Allen said, "If *Interiors* has to be compared to something, I really think it's closer to bad O'Neill, bad Chekhov or bad Strindberg than bad Bergman."¹⁶

In *Interiors*, Allen deals with one of the key issues of American late twentieth-century society. He captures in form—in the perfect, cold, dustless sterility of the film's interior settings—the repression of disorderly human feelings in his characters' interior lives. Pearl is the only person who is dressed in bright colors instead of in shades of dying autumn yellows and light browns. And it is she who is spontaneous, emotional, and compassionate. The theme of the crippling effects of the intellect, as opposed to the life-enriching qualities of spontaneous emotion, is a theme that runs through most of the important works of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian literature. In this way, Allen is very much a follower of that tradition.

While direct allusions to Russian culture, such as references to Soviet film director Dovzhenko's movie *Earth* and to a collection of Tolstoy letters, play a minor role in Allen's next movie, *Manhattan* (1979), Russian literature's major legacy in this instance is the focus on the search for the meaning of life. "The meaning of life is life itself" is Tolstoy's message in *Anna Karenina*, as he plots Levin's tortured path from despair to serenity. Levin discovers the meaning of life in the simple living of it after he rejects intellectual constructs that purport to teach a philosophy of life. Tolstoy praises Levin for his capacity to live a life of integrity, freed from the demands of society's sham and hypocrisy.

Woody Allen's Isaac, the main character in *Manhattan*, is concerned with the question of why life is worth living. He, like Levin, decides that it is in the particles of beauty enfolded into everyday life that ultimate meaning resides. Are there certain things that make life worth living?, Allen asks. Isaac's answer is, "Groucho Marx, Willie Mays, the second movement of the Jupiter Symphony, Louis Armstrong, Swedish movies, Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*, Marlon Brando, the apples and pears of Cezanne, ...and Tracy's face." When he confronts his friend Yale's habitual impulse to compromise with life, Isaac declares, "It is very important to have some kind of personal integrity." It is important to him to live life according to a set of moral, ethical values. In this, Allen is very close to the Russian novel tradition that insists that values and ethics are essential components of living a full life.

Manhattan disparages cerebral "pseudo-intellectual garbage" and in the character of the innocent young Tracy, praises the simple, direct apprehension of life. At one point Tracy gives Isaac a harmonica, saying that she wants to cultivate his capacity to experience life spontaneously. Similarly, Allen states that Tracy is God's answer to Job. Again Allen is squarely in the camp of those artists and writers that seek ultimate meaning and value in life.

A *Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* (1982), Allen's spoof of Shakespearean

comedy and light Bergman films, also contains a couple of bows to the Russian tradition. A crow, in a brief shot familiar to Eisenstein buffs, plays a minor role. So, too, does an image that can be traced to Chekhov's play about a bird, "The Seagull," with a hero who shoots himself and then appears with a bandaged head. In that play, as in Allen's film, one of the chief characters is a doctor. In the film, Allen's light comedy of errors camouflages the more serious "message," the importance of experience, rather than philosophical construct, as a guide to life; the importance of the unseen, mysterious, irrational dimensions of existence, rather than the purely rational, as a guide to reality. Allen's ongoing commentaries on the war between intellect and life's irrational forces are familiar to the readers of Russian literature.

Allen's next film, *Zelig* (1983), continues a theme from his earlier work—the necessity to live a life of personal integrity. In *Zelig*, Allen documents the tragedy, albeit in comic form, of a person who fails to live life according to his own sense of values. In his comic portrayal of Zelig, the "human chameleon," Allen plots the sad history of Leonard Zelig, who, because he has so little sense of himself and wants so much to be liked, takes on the personality of, and literally becomes, another person. Allen urges, "You have to be your own person and make your own moral choices." Otherwise, he says, a person becomes a lizard or a robot. The point is that each person must have confidence in his or her own sense of self; lack of trust in oneself is dangerous.

Zelig's greatest ties are to American twentieth-century culture.¹⁷ However, the director's constant concern with the big questions of deciding how to live one's life in a meaningful way, once again, identifies him as an inheritor of the Russian literary tradition. And, in one way, Woody Allen follows more directly in the footsteps of Russian writers in this film. Because of his mental problems, Zelig becomes other people's doubles. Allen, here, is taking to the extreme the basic plot of Dostoevsky's *The Double*, in which a mentally ill person, because of his insecurity, conjures up a literal double.

In *Zelig*, Allen is addressing himself to some of the essential problems of present-day society. If, according to Allen, people fail to think for themselves, the result will be fascism. In fact, Allen has stated that this was the theme of his film. Brode quotes Allen: "It's that need to be liked just to keep people around you pacified. I thought that desire not to make waves, carried to an extreme, could have traumatic consequences. It could ultimately lead to fascism."¹⁸ One of the "witnesses," commenting on the phenomenon of Zelig, asks, "Has America changed so much? I don't think so."

In *The Double*, Dostoevsky described the sickness and disintegration of one human personality. Allen, in the person of Zelig, applies his diagnosis to society as a whole. His implication is that if people become human chameleons, if they are unable to maintain their own sense of self when confronted with any other person, the groundwork will be laid for the emergence of a Hitler. The device Allen uses in *Zelig*, carrying a psychological trait or a philosophical idea to its extreme, is one that Dostoevsky often uses in his novels. One of the best examples of this is the narrator's statement, in *Notes from Underground*, that he is

merely taking to their logical extreme, ideas that most people would not dare to take halfway.

Woody Allen's *Broadway Danny Rose* (1984) is a movie strongly rooted in the American tradition of vaudeville comedy. At the same time, though, Allen's concern with life's values is woven into the film. Allen emphasizes the universal values of acceptance, forgiveness, and love. Danny says that although laughter is important, the capacity to suffer is equally significant in living one's life in a meaningful way. (This statement is reminiscent of the old joke I tell my students about the difference between a Russian comedy and a Russian tragedy: in a Russian tragedy, everyone dies, and in a Russian comedy, everyone dies, but happily.)

Allen's next film, the bittersweet *Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), focuses on the theme of the boundary between reality and illusion/fiction. Although this subject has appeared in many works of art in many lands, here, too, there is a reverberation with Russian literature. "Nevsky Prospect," one of Gogol's "Petersburg Stories," tells the tale of a man who dreamed endlessly of a beautiful woman he had seen on the city streets. In his fantasy, she is the ideal woman. In reality, he finds out, she is a prostitute. Ultimately, he cannot deal with the disillusioning realization that the real woman does not match his world of make-believe. In *Purple Rose of Cairo*, Tom, a character in a film within the film, falls in love with Cecilia, a woman who has been watching the film over and over again in a dreary movie theater in a dreary small New Jersey town during the Depression. As in "Nevsky Prospect," the real person must face reality, rather than her illusory version of reality. Cecilia realizes that life with the fictional Tom and his fictional money and fictional sex (after the kiss, there is always a fade-out) is not the same as living real life with real people with their real flaws.

Allen's basic point is that it is necessary to choose the real world, no matter how imperfect and unsatisfying that world may be; perfection is a quality that exists only in the land of make-believe. As the viewer of *Purple Rose of Cairo* discovers, Cecilia's life with her bullying, unfaithful husband, Monk, is dreary, but her attempt to live in the world of movie-screen imagination is not a viable alternative. Life hurts—witness the lies that the character Gil Shephard, the actor who plays Tom, tells Cecilia in order to woo her away from Tom—but, ultimately, according to Allen, it's the only show in town.

Hannah and her Sisters (1986) brings Woody Allen closer to Russian literature than he had been in quite some time. There is a passing reference to Russian culture (in Holly's comment about forming the Stanislavsky Catering Company) and a significant Russian literature underpinning to the film. Allen has written that the idea of the two parallel story lines, in which one story line unfolds the history of Hannah and her sisters and the other delineates Mickey's search for meaning in life, derived from the structure of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. In "Auteur! Auteur!," Caryn James' article about Allen (*New York Times Magazine*, January 19, 1986), the director is quoted: "...I reread *Anna Karenina*, and I thought, it's interesting how this guy gets the various stories going, cutting from one story to another. I loved the idea of experimenting with that.... I thought it would be

interesting to do one story about the relationship between three sisters, then one story about somebody else and his obsession with mortality."¹⁹

In Tolstoy's novel, the reader follows the fate of Anna's adulterous love affair and at the same time, follows Levin in his search for the meaning of life. Both *Anna Karenina* and *Hannah and her Sisters* contain the story of adultery. In the novel and in the film, the two story lines are interwoven with one another. Similarly, a male protagonist, in his search for the meaning of life, attempts to find answers in some of the world's great religions. This quest brings him within an inch of suicide, but he ultimately finds happiness in a relationship with one woman. In addition, as in *Anna Karenina*, a strong woman (Hannah) plays a star role.

A Dostoevsky-like aura surrounds one episode of the movie. Sounding very much like Ivan Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Mickey asks a member of his family, "If there is a God, why is there so much evil?" He questions why the Nazis had to exist. In true non-Dostoevskian "Allenesque," Mickey's father replies, "How do I know why there's so much evil? I don't know how the can opener works."

In *Radio Days* (1987), as in previous works, Allen throws his audience Russian literature references. Sally, we learn, is going to be in a Chekhov radio performance. Aunt Bea's behavior is reminiscent of the three sisters' in Chekhov's play. Chekhov's sisters look toward a better life that the audience knows will never be, as they repeatedly cry out their plaintive refrain, "To Moscow, to Moscow." Aunt Bea always thinks that her romantic Prince Charming will materialize, as she repeatedly dates suitor after woeful suitor.

Thematically and structurally, Allen repeats in *Radio Days* some of the Tolstoyan lessons he had learned and previously used in *Hannah and her Sisters*. Tolstoy, in *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, often cuts from one short scene to another. (Scholars have pointed to the cinematic quality of his fiction.) Sometimes Tolstoy splices an unhappy scene to a happy one, as in *Anna Karenina*, for example, where he places the description of the birth of Levin's and Kitty's baby immediately after the episode about Levin's brother's death. *Radio Days* uses the same technique of capturing the rhythm of life by interweaving unhappy and happy scenes. An episode about the failed attempt to rescue a little girl immediately precedes a carefree scene in a night club.

Radio Days is a light work that provokes gentle laughter. Yet even here, as in so many Woody Allen films of the last decade, there is a Russian-like "meaning of life" layer. For Allen, as for Tolstoy, life's little events, when enshrined, are eternal, beautiful, and pure. They infuse life with ultimate meaning even as human beings face their mortality and insignificance in the grand scheme of the universe. The meaning of life is in the living of it, as Levin had discovered in *Anna Karenina*.

Another Woman (1988) might be the film that is, on the surface, least directly linked to Allen's Russian literature heritage. The concerns are those of contemporary American society: professional women caught between the demands of family and career; all people, trapped in an environment that

encourages intellect and stifles emotions. The implicit and explicit references to literature and art are drawn exclusively from Western European and American sources. Allen's main character, fifty-year old philosophy professor Marian, quotes the Rilke poem, "The Panther," and comments on Klimt's painting, "Hope." When the present-day Marian revisits her childhood, the technique that comes most readily to mind is that same device in Thornton Wilder's play, *Our Town*, when Emily, after death, pays a visit to her childhood. Yet even in this film Allen's Russian roots show a bit. A recurrent theme of Allen's, as we have seen, is the tragedy of lives poisoned by an inability to feel. The overly cerebral approach to life, he keeps telling us, deadens our purest, most holy capacity to live life fully. In *Another Woman*, Allen demonstrates that tragedy in his story of Marian's life. He captures, on screen, the quality of overintellectualization that damages the lives of so many people in American society today. At the same time, the theme resonates to Woody Allen's own history. As someone who has learned from his personal experience with psychoanalysis, he documents Freud's belief that certain voices in our psyches prevent our spontaneous emotions from living a free life. Allen remains true to his Russian literary roots, for the giants of nineteenth-century Russian literature, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, warned over and over again that to live only in the mind paralyzes our heart and soul.

One can trace Woody Allen's creative roots to American and Western European film, literature, and comedy. However, we must include in our study of his works his indebtedness to and affinity with Russian literature and culture. Our acknowledgement of this point makes us understand Woody Allen's cinematic world that much better. He chronicles a particular slice of late twentieth-century Manhattan and American life. He documents, with precision, people's everyday events and crises, adulterous impulses and lonely cries, entangled family relationships and gnawing individual doubts. Beyond chronicling everyday life, Allen's films represent a deep, intense grappling with the deepest, most intense questions about living one's life. He is one of a very small number of American artists today whose major focus is the ultimate meaning of life. And it is this dimension of his movies that strongly links him to the great Russian writers of the past.

What, then, do we learn by skipping through the fields of Russian literature with Woody Allen? We learn that no matter what phase of his *oeuvre* we examine, the early funny stories and films, the "laughter through tears" movies, or the deadly serious works, we find an artist who cares deeply about the ultimate questions that define a human being's life. Allen's own words, quoted in the *Daily News* of September 26, 1980, confirm this idea: "Like everybody else I would have liked to have written the Russian novels. They have been the most fun for me... I've never thought of wanting to have written something else."²⁰ And later, in the same interview, he says, "My obsession has been the utter tragedy of the human condition... It's an interesting thing when you see that subject elaborated on, filtered through or created upon by Dostoevsky and Tolstoy and Kafka and people like that... Then you see someone like myself who is interested or obsessed with those themes but you get them filtered through an

infinitely less intelligent, infinitely less literate, less gifted person with a completely different sensibility, a sensibility of films and the streets of New York. In a sense it is almost not perceived as the same subject matter because the sensibility dealing with it is so different."²¹

Is Woody Allen intelligent? Yes. Gifted? Yes. And who knows? Perhaps, one hundred years from now, a talented Tokyo artist working in a not-yet-invented medium will assert enthusiastically that he/she loves to watch Woody Allen's films. The sensibility is different, our artist of the future will say, for it is the cinema of Woody Allen as filtered through Tokyo thoroughfares and filtered through the different sensibility of the new medium.

NOTES

1. Woody Allen, as quoted in Joe Klein, "Woody on the Town," *Gentlemen's Quarterly* (February, 1986):172.
2. Woody Allen, as quoted by Eric Lax, *On Being Funny. Woody Allen and Comedy* (New York: Charterhouse, 1975), 45.
3. Woody Allen, "Notes from the Overfed (After reading Dostoevski and the new 'Weight Watchers' magazine on the same plane trip)," in Woody Allen, *Getting Even* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 62.
4. Allen stated, "I saw Sergei Bondarchuk's eight-hour version of *War and Peace* and I thought it would be a good atmosphere to fool around with." Woody Allen, as quoted in "How to Be Neurotic for Fun and Profit," *Sunday News* (July 20, 1975):7. On this point, also see Robert F. Moss, "Woody Allen," *Saturday Review* (November, 1980):44.
5. For the process of selecting music for *Love and Death*, see Ralph Rosenblum and Robert Karen, *When the Shooting Stops...the Cutting Begins. A Film Editor's Story* (New York: The Viking Press, 1979), 270.
6. Woody Allen, "By Destiny Denied," in Woody Allen, *Side Effects* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980), 23-32.
7. Woody Allen, "Nefarious Times We Live In," in Woody Allen, *Side Effects*, 122.
8. Woody Allen, "God (A Play)," in Woody Allen, *Without Feathers* (New York: Warner Books, 1976), 129-190.
9. Woody Allen, "The UFO Menace," in Woody Allen, *Side Effects*, 39.
10. Woody Allen, "The Shallowest Man," in Woody Allen, *Side Effects*, 139-155.
11. Nikolai Gogol, "The Nose," in Nikolai Gogol, *The Overcoat and Other Tales of Good and Evil*, trans. David Magarshack (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1965), 231-232.
12. Woody Allen, "Fabulous Tales and Mythical Beasts," in Woody Allen, *Without Feathers*, 191.
13. Woody Allen, "The Flying Snoll," in "Fabulous Tales and Mythical Beasts," in Woody Allen, *Without Feathers*, 192.
14. Woody Allen, "The Flying Snoll," 192.
15. On Allen and these cultural associations, see, for instance, Woody Allen, as quoted in *Daily News* (September 26, 1980):3; Robert Benayoun, *The Films of Woody Allen*, trans. Alexander Walker (New York: Harmony Books, 1986), 37, 91, 157; Eric Lax, *On Being Funny. Woody Allen and Comedy*, 45, 117; Joe Klein, "Woody on the Town," 175; Myles Palmer, *Woody Allen. An Illustrated Biography* (London and New York: Proteus, 1980), 71; Woody Allen, as quoted by Arthur Bell, in *Village Voice* (June 16, 1975):101; Woody Allen, as quoted in Harold Mantell, in "The Words and Ways of Woody Allen," *Media*

and *Methods* (December, 1977):45.

16. Myles Palmer, *Woody Allen. An Illustrated Biography*, 102.
17. Douglas Brode, in his book, *Woody Allen. His Films and Career*, writes that the film is structured according to the "documentary" "witness" style of Warren Beatty's film *Reds* and that it cites F. Scott Fitzgerald. (Beatty's film records the story of the American radical, John Reed, who went to the Soviet Union.) Douglas Brode, *Woody Allen. His Films and Career* (Secaucus: Citadel Press, 1985), 228, 230.
18. Woody Allen, as quoted in Douglas Brode, *Woody Allen. His Films and Career*, 227.
19. Caryn James, "Auteur! Auteur!," *New York Times Magazine* (January 19, 1986):25.
20. Woody Allen, as quoted in *Daily News* (September 26, 1980):3.
21. Woody Allen, as quoted in *Daily News* (September 26, 1980):3.