



Jewishly Universal - Woody Allen's Film-Persona, its Jewish Roots and Universal Appeal, with references to Annie Hall and Manhattan

Gergana Kantcheva

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Seminar paper from the year 2003 in the subject American Studies - Culture and Applied Geography, grade: 2,0 (B), Humboldt-University of Berlin (Instituut für Sociology), 11 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: Woody Allen, known as the “Intellectual” among American filmmakers, is one of the most productive Jewish artists of our time. Never limiting himself on just one genre, he has entertained audiences with humorous one-liners, stand-up routines, comic prose, plays, screenplays, acting roles, and film direction for more than half a decade. His self-mocking style, frequent triple involvement (writer, director, actor) in his films and casting of his real life lovers (e.g. Diane Keaton) as his character's film lovers, have led to a diffusion of Allen the private person, Allen the public person and the so called “Allen persona”, a type also known as Stadtneurotiker.

Allen, born Allan Stewart Konigsberg, has often denied (in interviews) that Jewishness plays a major role in his work, other than just simply being a part of himself. “It's not on my mind; it's not part of my artistic consciousness. Of course, any character I play would be Jewish, just because I'm Jewish.”¹ This claimed disinterest and his often negative and critical depiction of Jewish characters and habits has led to him being labeled as a self-hating Jew. Nevertheless, many critics argue that the Allen film-persona and Allen's humor have their roots in an old Jewish literary and comedic tradition and the central concept of the schlemiel as hero, which he has adapted to his individual circumstances - late Twentieth century, New York, English etc. - and successfully transferred to the film medium.

Although, as already mentioned, Woody Allen explores very different genres, one major characteristic of his work is “the persistence of the character whose role Woody Allen performed himself most of the time but had sometimes interpreted by other actors: his persona.”² [...]

1 Allen as quoted by Marie-Phoenix Rivet, “Woody Allen: The Relationship Between the Persona and the Author” in King, ed. Woody Allen. A Casebook, p. 27

2 Rivet, p. 23



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