

arresting.

Ah, but the novella is just half the book. Burgess, who has published book length studies on Joyce, Hemingway, and Shakespeare, turns next to *Nineteen Eighty-four*. Consider: both Orwell and Burgess were schooled in British universities, did time in the military, worked in the Southeast Asian colonies for the Royal Government, and established careers as novelists and journalists. And for what it is worth, both adopted pen names. Burgess's affinity makes him the ideal critic for Orwell.

Why did Orwell write *Nineteen Eighty-four*? Burgess tell us there was more English than Socialism in Orwell's English Socialism. He was bound to tradition, literature that didn't help the "cause," and bourgeois tastes, and he saw himself writing in the spirit of Defoe and Swift. Orwell fought with the Marxists in Spain only to run for his life when the Russian Communists turned on the Catalanian Anarchists. After he dramatized the Russian Revolution as a barnyard fable in *Animal Farm*, his desire to right the spoiled dream, "the revolution betrayed," led him to conjure an anti-utopia to dispel the false utopian image Uncle Joe Stalin was projecting of the Soviet Union.

Burgess also informs us that Orwell worked for the BBC during the war at Broadcast House, an analogue of the Ministry of Truth. In *Nineteen Eighty-four* the room in which each person's personal horror is exposed is Room 101. At Broadcast House Orwell worked in Room 101 broadcasting propaganda to India. Propaganda is not too far removed from double-think, nor is it that distant from the polemic of *Nineteen Eighty-four*. Winston Smith erases history for the State. Bev Jones refuses to

teach the State's version of history. Orwell shaped the news to help the State shape history. *Nineteen Eighty-four*, an entry in what Burgess calls the Worst of All Imaginary Worlds stakes, was designed to shape the future.

Burgess mixes straight-ahead essay and self-interview to critique *Nineteen Eighty-four*. The self-interview is a handy didactic device enabling Burgess to play his own devil's advocate. Burgess has written that when a novelist turns critic often he is too soft a critic because he sympathizes with the author. Burgess is a gentle critic. He refuses to come between the reader and the novel, preferring the role of intelligent companion. His tour of *Nineteen Eighty-four* is not an easy one to summarize. Bakunin's legacy, Charles Manson as a bloody Jesus, a comparison of the Pelagian and Augustinian theologies, a linguistic appraisal of Newspeak, and a short history of the cacotopia (a word of Burgess's invention meaning an anti-utopia—the invention of new words is a Burgessian cottage industry) are held up against Orwell's novel to illuminate better its meaning. Good stuff.

Like his hero, Bev Jones, Anthony Burgess despises authoritarianism whether its source is clan, church, union, or state. Whether he is a libertarian is of little concern to me. Like Orwell, he is a free-thinker uncomfortable with dogma and ideology. Tax-exile Burgess, like his heroes, would rather ignore the State and get on with the personal and spiritual concerns of life. But to do that he tells us we must heed Milton's warning to Cromwell's England—we must hang on to our liberties.

Jack Shafer writes frequently for LR.

On View

Woody Allen's Manhattan

DAVID BRUDNOY

"I THINK PEOPLE should make for life, like pigeons and Catholics." Isaac Davis (Woody Allen) has lovely dreams like that, even after two marriages, the last of which went ker-plop when his wife, Jill (Meryl Streep), left him—for another woman. She's also writing a book about their life together (and apart) called *Marriage, Divorce and Selfhood*. Isaac frets that all his friends will read about his quirks and his crotchets—like how he does in bed and *what* he does in bed—and that his ex-wife will distort and exaggerate things, as when she insists that he tried to run over her lover. "Can I help it if the car accelerated?" he asks. "Just as I was walking in front of it?" the lady lover shoots back. And why did Isaac marry her in the first place? "You knew my history when you married me," she says. "My analyst warned me," he allows, "but you were so beautiful that I got another analyst."

This is *Manhattan*, the latest and most fully realized and wonderful of Woody Allen's screen ventures, a wedding of the comedic brilliance, sophistication and neurotic wit of *Annie Hall* to the "seriousness" of *Interiors*, a film, incidentally, that demonstrated to close observers a deep although dark humor beneath the grimness. *Manhattan* is almost unbearably deadly in hitting its targets; it'll make chic upper-East-side New Yorkers squirm as they make their Saturday hegira to Bloomingdale's, and their next Sunday devoted entirely to the *Times* might suddenly seem rather like a cultural cliché. Of that book

she's writing, Isaac's ex-wife observes that "nothing I wrote was untrue." Besides, "I think I'd better warn you that I've had interest in a movie sale." Just what Isaac needs.

What Isaac does seem to need is the love of a good woman, or at least a good child. As the movie opens he has the latter. Seventeen-year-old Tracy (Mariel Hemingway, Ernest's granddaughter) might be Isaac's avenue of escape from relationships with mature women; she is, in any case, wholly unconcerned that Isaac is 42, and, as she slightly incorrectly computes it when he projects her into the future, when she's 37 he'll be 63. Even that doesn't dissuade Tracy, no more than Isaac's suggestion that she have affairs with her school chums, the Billys and Biffs and Scooters and other ridiculously named kids of her class and age. *Manhattan*, which begins with the New York skyline and shifting vignettes of the city, and the sounds of Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" played by Paul Jacobs and the New York Philharmonic, soon introduces us to Isaac's tortured attempts to compose an opening sentence for his latest book, a sentence that tries to combine a sensitive soul's love-loathing relationship to Gotham; soon thereafter, we meet Isaac, his friends, his current girl, his anguish and his Age's self-indulgent concerns. In time he will reject Tracy and take up with yet another mature woman. It might have been his undoing.

Mary Wilke (Diane Keaton) is the current extracurricular interest of Isaac's closest friend, Yale (Michael Murphy), a man who loves his wife, Emily (Anne Byrne), but needs that bit of half-involvement that only a nice guilt-inducing affair on the side can provide. But Yale decides to make do with a wife alone, parts with Mary in a splen-

did short scene at a sidewalk cafe, leaving to Isaac whatever consolation can be gained from Mary, who is "into" everything—reviewing obscure books for more obscure journals, going to all the right gatherings (including one featuring Bella Abzug, to push for the E.R.A.), knowing how to disparage Mahler and Bergman and anybody else who might be fashionable with people a year or so out of date—and whose level of self-awareness is expressed with merry good cheer: "I'm beautiful, I'm young, I'm highly intelligent, I've got everything going for me except I'm all fucked up. . . . I could go to bed with the entire M.I.T. faculty. Shit! Now I lost my contact lens." Mary is beautiful and intelligent and she is a bitch. Just made for Isaac.

Except that Mary decides

at last that she still loves Yale, which eases Isaac out of the picture, or rather it propels him to a surprising, gratifying, improbable but nonetheless beautiful ending scene that the viewer will want to discover for himself. With which we return again to the New York skyline, and to Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," framing a picture scored entirely with Gershwin's lovely tunes. Love is sweeping the country, we might actually believe at *Manhattan's* close, and I've got a crush on you, and on you and on you, too, and strike up the band because there's someone to watch over me. Truly, s'wonderful.

Manhattan is Woody Allen's magnum opus, at least to date. Gone, probably forever, is the character Woody played and replayed: the shnook, the in-

competent with women, the hopeless nice guy who always loses. Gone, too, is Woody Allen's need to get the biggest laugh out of every situation. He has said in an interview that he left some of *Manhattan's* funniest scenes on the cutting room floor, because they intruded, they added nothing necessary. And gone, maybe, is his insistence in *Interiors* that we be spared even one joke, lest we misunderstand his meaning and think we were in for yet another stock Woody Allen comedy. This is the flowering of one of our greatest contemporary cultural treasures, Allen Stewart Konigsberg, reborn as Woody Allen, now so confident of his powers that he has learned to combine a sly and barbed humor with a knowing awareness of the more sober traps that modern

man sets for modern man. It has a "classic" look, contributed by Gordon Willis's velvety black & white photography, and the lush and light and evocative sound of George Gershwin, and it emerges as a morality tale for our times, as unpreachy a morality tale as anyone could imagine. Just the same, though, it is a short lesson, one not altogether pretty, but altogether engaging.

Three years in a row Allen has given moviegoers a film to be remembered, *Annie Hall* in 1977, *Interiors* last year, now this. They might well be seen as stages in an evolution, and we might consider them as Allen's working out of some likely, if not inevitable, progression in his thought. *Annie Hall*, *Interiors*, and *Manhattan* all star Diane Keaton, as have other, earlier Woody



Allen movies; each carries Allen a giant step beyond his screwball comedies, even beyond his amusing and sometimes outrageously funny but still awkward satire, *Love and Death* (1975); only *Interiors* lacked Allen in a screen role, but in that film his absence was essential, since we were being instructed not to laugh, and to see Woody is to laugh. In the last three movies Allen broke with the easier patterns of his early films, culminating now in this mature, measured dissection of hollow people making their own miserable lives more miserable by refusing to take anything as a given, by resolutely willing themselves into complications. If *Manhattan* is not as obviously funny as, say, *Bananas*, it is because Woody has now become confident enough of his vast talent to eschew the easy guffaw in order to construct the more complex situations that are themselves so risible, as well as so pathetic. *Manhattan* is a hard and cold movie, with touches of warmth that are the more precious because they arise from such an arid landscape. *Annie Hall* was the quintessential New Yorker's revenge on California, *Interiors* his gesture to the gods of respectability (so Bergmanesque, as everyone duly noted, that Bergman's *Autumn Sonata*, which appeared shortly after *Interiors*, could with a straight face be described by some critics as Woodyesque), *Manhattan* his own rhapsody in blue, his masterpiece.

I wrote earlier that *Manhattan* is a morality tale. By which I don't mean to imply that it is censorious, or that it pits good guys against bad guys, or computes the sins and ladles out the punishments. It does not leave anyone particularly devastated or, except for Yale's wife, abandoned—and Emily takes Yale's decision to leave her and move in

with Mary quite philosophically, casually remarking to Isaac that she *almost* blames him for the final turn of events, because if Isaac had not introduced Mary to Yale, none of this would

have happened. Emily doesn't know that Isaac was the meatloaf in a sandwich date, the bread of which was Yale first and Yale at last. Only Isaac's lesbian ex-wife is drawn sketchily, and she,

we are fully confident, will do quite nicely with her lover, and will with her lover provide two fine mothers for Willie (Damion Sheller), her and Isaac's son. Streep, by the way, who came within a



Scenes from Woody Allen's *Interiors* (top) and *Manhattan*: last stages in the evolution of a masterpiece.

hair of winning a best supporting actress Oscar for her stunning work in *The Deer Hunter*, gives such fullness to her small part as Isaac's former wife that she fills in with a few gestures what the screenplay omits. Allen's and Marshall Brickman's screenplay is so expressive, so tight, so restrained, and so wickedly funny while also being so poignant that I am going to predict, not yet half way through the year, that it will pick up one of those gold statuettes at next April's Oscarfest. How much *really* wound up on the floor of director Allen's cutting room, I don't know; what is on the screen is flawless.

Woody here says more about love, about the impediments to love, about loneliness and desperation, about making do and refusing to make do, than almost any other movie of the last several years. *Manhattan* swims in the concept of love, virtually drowns us in its variations, never once denigrates the centrality of love in man's life, but never romanticizes or trivializes love. The lovers in this film are often ridiculous, as people in love, or people who think they're in love and don't quite know what to make of it, usually are. But Love itself is not ridiculous and Allen is calm enough this time to accept that unblushingly—to submerge it, granted, in the film's almost sensual love of a city, THE city—but never to ridicule it. *Annie Hall* was a lovable film, *too* lovable, in many long desperate stretches too cute, and awfully self-pitying. I rejected it on first viewing, seeing it as shamelessly autobiographical but still coyly distancing: Woody's love-hate relationship with the gentile world, the in humor of a certain literary-cultural set, the outlandish situations designed to hammer home some fairly obvious points. *Annie Hall* struck me two

years ago as an uncomfortable transition piece. A second viewing opened me to a different interpretation, which I now realize was an initial grasping of something that *Interiors* and *Manhattan* have made very clear. And *Interiors*, for all that it, like *Annie Hall*, is a brilliant exercise in intellectualizing, is the missing piece in the puzzle, or, rather, now seems so obviously the link: a hauntingly beautiful, deeply moving screen triumph, branching off from the zany Woody's awkward contact with the concepts Family and Love, providing the crossing-over place from comedy for comedy's sake to the comedy within sobriety of *Manhattan*. I would not reduce these three pictures to units in a triptych, or suggest that they have meaning only, or even primarily, in conjunction with each other; I would only urge the viewer to keep *Annie Hall* and *Interiors* in mind when experiencing *Manhattan*, and to see if the reading I've given the three movies isn't, at least, plausible.

Woody's lesson in *Manhattan* is quite simple. It is a gentle warning against emotional suicide as practiced among the tribe of the urban trendies. It is an even gentler urging that people enjoy what they have while they have it, and not pine for some brighter green pasture around the bend. And it holds up human affection as the strongest weapon we have against the long dark night, as the most powerful charm to ward off the evil spirit Loneliness, and as the most precious thing we have as we race from fresh-scrubbed youth to decrepit old age.

The writing is so modulated that none of this is vulgarly presented; reducing *Manhattan* to analysis, or even, as here, deliberately, only to brief description and the most cursory of interpretation, strips this remarkable movie of its fullness.

"He was too romantic about New York," Woody-Isaac narrates over the New York scenes with which the film begins, which quickly shifts to a bitter (or bittersweet) depiction of Manhattan, the place, as "a metaphor for the decay of our culture." Only in the opening few minutes, and this as a parody of Woody's own earlier parodic and satiric films, is anything made quite so explicit. Elsewhere, while the tongue meanders about in the farthest crevices of the cheek, the put-ons and the send-ups are purposeful: they don't pummel us, they cozy us into awareness. In one scene, at a party, a pretentious fellow is talking about his brilliant idea for a novel—or is it a movie?—about a person who delivers such fabulous orgasms that his partners die when they come. A woman remarks that she finally had an orgasm and her doctor told her that it was the wrong *kind* of orgasm. To which Isaac responds, bemusedly: Wrong *kind* of orgasm? All *my* orgasms are the right kind, he boasts. "The *least* of my orgasms—right on the button." In many of Allen's early movies a scene like that would be played out at length, would rise to a crescendo; in *Manhattan* it is a quick bite and over and out. (It is, precisely, 54 seconds; I know, because our perverse genius, Mr. Woody Allen, provided a clip of just this scene, and only this scene, to us television reviewers, knowing full well that we wouldn't be able to use it on TV. Woody not only forbids critics' advance screenings, he also arranges things so that those of us who review films on TV are reduced to illustrating our two-minute gems of cinema wisdom with static glossies. The man not only controls almost every facet of the making of his films, he also reaches out and controls what happens to them after they are released. If his

recent films weren't so brilliant, I suppose we TV critics would bellow. As it is, most of us are resigned to the fate he prepares for us.)

The movie presents not only a scrupulously apt screenplay to tell a serious and majestically funny story, it is a showcase for a half dozen outstanding performances. Woody *becomes* a lover a gorgeous teenie child could adore. Michael Murphy, Woody's close friend and a key figure in several of his films, is perfect as the weak, indecisive, cuddly and pleasant Yale. (And isn't that name wonderfully suggestive?) Streep, as noted above, makes every one of her few minutes on screen memorable: her Jill is no bull dyke caricature, but a wholly believable homosexual woman rather single-mindedly pursuing her own ends. Mariel Hemingway, first seen, I believe, in *Lipstick*, which starred her impossibly tall, impossibly gorgeous, impossibly talentless model sister, Margaux, is at a tender age not only outstandingly beautiful but also bursting with talent. A little more fullness to her voice, and a starring role of her own, and she'll be dynamite. Anne Byrne, Dustin Hoffman's wife, has the tiniest of roles here, as Yale's wife, but she fills it fully. And Keaton—Keaton has taken an unappealing role, given it the full measure of her talent, put aside those almost trademark gestures that have been distracting in so many of her screen parts, and, as is now becoming her pattern, walks away with the film. Diane Keaton joins Meryl Streep and Jane Fonda and perhaps a handful of other actresses as the best we have on screen today. Watch Keaton move from the brash know-it-all to the cock-tease to the vulnerable lady unsure of just *whose* cock to tease to the woman methodically concluding that Yale is the man for her: watch that trans-

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formation in 93 minutes and see a fantastic actress strut her stuff.

Manhattan joins *Hair* and *The Deer Hunter* in the Olympian reaches of true cinema brilliance confronting us within the last half year. At one point Isaac remarks that "the brain is the most overrated organ."

Maybe so. But only a fully charged brain, encompassing a mature sensitivity and tenderness, can conceive something as memorable as a philosophically consistent, faultlessly intelligent work of movie art. Of Mary, Isaac says: she is "the winner of the Zelda Fitzgerald Emotional Maturity Award." Of

himself Isaac says: "In my relationships with women, I win the August Strindberg Award." Well, they are neat little throw-away lines, speaking volumes of truth in the kernel of a quip. Try this one, and test it with an hour and a half in the theater: *Manhattan* wins the best motion picture of 1979

award. I don't think I'll have to retract that one. ☐

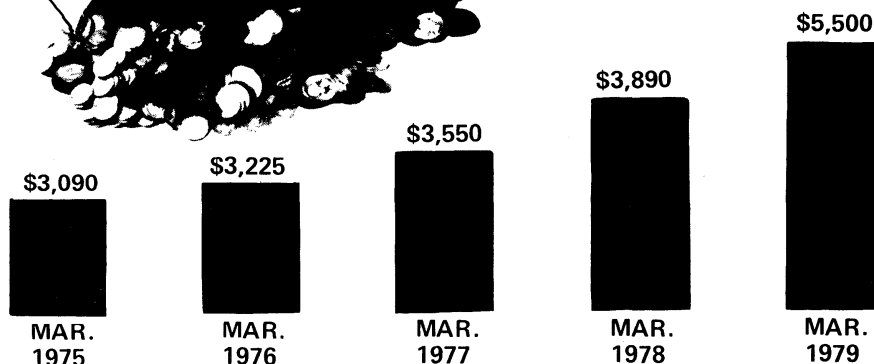
LR's film critic reviews films and plays for WNAC-TV (CBS), where he also hosts a weekly talk and entertainment program, "Nightscene." He is host, as well, of "The David Brudnoy Show" on WHDH-AM, also in Boston. ©Copy-right David Brudnoy 1979

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