

☐ Contemporary  
Literary Criticism

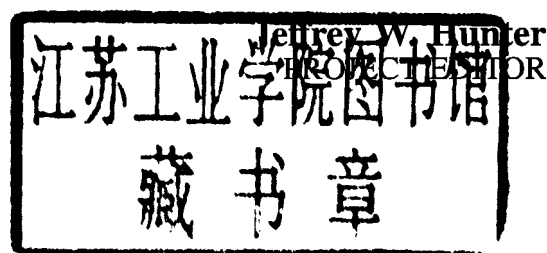
**CLC**

**195**

Volume 195

# Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works  
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,  
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and  
Other Creative Writers



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## Preface

**N**amed “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today’s reader.

### Scope of the Series

*CLC* provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete biographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

### Organization of the Book

A *CLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Thomson Gale, including *CLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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# Woody Allen

## 1935-

(Born Allen Stewart Konigsberg; name legally changed to Heywood Allen) American film director, screenwriter, actor, playwright, and humorist.

The following entry provides criticism on Allen's career through 2003. For further information on his life and works, see *CLC*, Volumes 16 and 52.

### INTRODUCTION

Allen is a celebrated filmmaker, each of whose works bears the unmistakable signature of his unique style. His distinct screen persona has entered the cultural mainstream as an immediately recognizable type: an intellectual aesthete who is wracked by the multiple burdens of social insecurity, sexual neurosis, paranoia, existential angst, and chronic unhappiness. The writer, director, and star of the majority of his films, Allen may be the most prolific filmmaker of his generation, having released more than thirty-five films in thirty-eight years of filmmaking to date. His best-known and critically acclaimed films include *Annie Hall* (1977), *Manhattan* (1979), *Zelig* (1983), and *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986).



### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Allen was born December 1, 1935, in Brooklyn, New York, and was raised in a working-class Jewish neighborhood of Brooklyn. While in high school, Allen began writing and selling jokes for humor columnists and celebrity comedians. He became a staff writer for the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) in 1952, where he wrote jokes for such entertainers as Sid Caesar, Art Carney, Carol Channing, and others. Allen attended New York's City College in 1953 but dropped out. The following year, while still a teenager, Allen married his high school sweetheart, Harlene Rosen; the couple divorced in 1960. During the 1960s Allen worked as a stand-up comedian in cafes and nightclubs throughout New York City, and appeared as a guest on several television talk shows. During this period he developed his comic persona and changed his name to Heywood Allen, adopting the nickname "Woody." Allen began making movies in 1965, when he was asked by producer Charles Feldman to write the screenplay for *What's New, Pussycat?* (1965). His first Broadway play,

*Don't Drink the Water*, was produced in 1966. That same year he married actress Louise Lasser, who co-starred in several of his films, and whom he divorced in 1970. During the 1970s Allen was involved with actress Diane Keaton, who also co-starred with him in his movies. *Annie Hall* is generally considered to be a semi-autobiographical account of his relationship with Keaton. During the 1980s Allen was involved with actress Mia Farrow, another co-star, with whom he maintained a relationship until the early 1990s. Although Allen and Farrow lived in separate apartment buildings and never married, they had a son together, born in 1987, and co-adopted two children. In 1992 Allen's personal life became a major news item, as Farrow accused him of sexually molesting one of their adopted daughters. At the same time, the fifty-seven-year-old Allen became openly involved in a relationship with the college-aged Soon-Yi Previn, one of Farrow's adopted children from an earlier marriage. In a series of bitter court battles with Farrow, Allen was cleared of charges of child molestation, but continued to experi-

ence public disapproval. In 1997 Allen married Soon-Yi, with whom he adopted a daughter. In addition to his yearly fall film project, Allen has played jazz clarinet with his band in a hotel lounge in New York every Monday night for over twenty-five years.

## MAJOR WORKS

Allen's earliest films are madcap comedies, tending toward social satire, sexual farce, and genre-parody, heavily laden with one-liners and physical slapstick humor. *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* (1966), *Take the Money and Run* (1969), *Bananas* (1971), *Play It Again, Sam* (1972; originally produced as a stage play in 1969), *Sleeper* (1973), and other films of this period introduced Allen's comic persona to audiences and established him as a leading comedian of his generation.

*Love and Death* (1975), marks the beginning of a transition in Allen's career, toward deeper and more serious themes than those presented in his earlier films. A parody of nineteenth-century Russian literature, particularly Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, the film features central characters who debate philosophical questions about the existence of God, the nature of morality, and the significance of death to the meaning of life, frequently citing and parodying famous philosophers. *Annie Hall* furthers Allen's movement away from madcap comedy. This bittersweet romantic comedy contains a more introspective exploration of male-female relationships and the nature of love in the modern world. Allen's most successful film, *Annie Hall* won Academy Awards for best picture, director, and screenplay in 1977. *Manhattan* is often discussed as a companion piece to *Annie Hall* as it explores similar themes, again within the genre of bittersweet romantic comedy. This period of Allen's career is also notable for two significant failures: *Interiors* (1978), Allen's first attempt at a completely serious film, and *Stardust Memories* (1980), which Allen himself has characterized as his least popular film. Both were critically and commercially unsuccessful.

In the 1980s Allen released several of his most critically admired films. In *Zelig* Allen plays the title character, who, because of insecurities about his identity, takes on the physical qualities of those he comes into contact with. Allen reproduced the quality of old black-and-white movie newsreels, utilized editing techniques to splice images of the protagonist into archival news footage, and used other devices to create the feel of an authentic documentary. *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) highlights the role of spectatorship in the imagination of the film viewer. An abused New Jersey housewife struggling through the Depression years attends the movies seeking relief from the grim

circumstances of her life. When her favorite character steps off the screen and falls in love with her, she must face the conundrum of living with a fantasy that has come true. *Hannah and Her Sisters* and *Husbands and Wives* (1992) explore the complex interrelationships of Manhattan couples struggling with the trials of modern marriage. *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989) examines Allen's recurring preoccupation with moral and existential questioning, and the significance of the Holocaust to modern thought.

During the 1990s and the early part of the new millennium, Allen made a number of films explicitly designed to be light entertainment, eschewing his heavier themes. In these works Allen expresses a sense of nostalgia for classic Hollywood movies of the 1930s and 1940s: *Manhattan Murder Mystery* (1993), *Everyone Says I Love You* (1996), *Small Time Crooks* (2000), and *The Curse of the Jade Scorpion* (2001) each pay homage to such old movie genres as the mystery-thriller, musical, and screwball comedy. During this period Allen also made several films, including *Bullets over Broadway* (1994), *Celebrity* (1998), and *Sweet and Lowdown* (1999), that combine elements of comedy with more complex matters such as the challenges facing the creative artist who battles to maintain his integrity in a world of mass entertainment. Allen continued his exploration of a creator's struggles in a commercial society in his most recent films, *Hollywood Ending* (2002) and *Anything Else?* (2003).

Allen's theatrical productions include *Don't Drink the Water*, *Death* (1975), *God* (1975), *The Floating Lightbulb* (1981), *Death Defying Acts* (1995), and *Writer's Block* (2003). He has authored numerous satirical essays and short stories, many of them originally published in the *New Yorker*, and later collected in volumes such as *Getting Even* (1971), *Without Feathers* (1975), *Side Effects* (1980), and *The Complete Prose* (1991).

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critics of Allen's overall body of work have identified recurring thematic concerns throughout his films. Such themes focus on identity crises, the significance of artistic expression to the creative mind, the role of dreams, fantasies, and films in the psychology of the individual, chronic questioning about the meaning of life and death, and the nature of good and evil. Critics have also noted the influence of such filmmakers as Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, and Jean-Luc Godard, and have compared Allen's screen persona to the "tramp" figure created by Charlie Chaplin: a prototypical "little man," a lovable and charming social underdog whose motives remain sincere and heartfelt in a modern

world of alienation and impersonal interactions. While Allen's persona also follows a heritage of Jewish comics such as the Marx Brothers—whom Allen has cited as a major influence on his work—the composite character is seen as Allen's unique creation.

Critics have generally agreed that Allen is at his best when working in the tragicomic vein, exploring serious themes of modern love and existential angst, balanced by a sense of the absurd. The films in which he intentionally withholds his penchant for comedy have generally been considered failures. *Annie Hall* is widely regarded as a perfect meshing of Allen's talents for comedy and absurdity with a sense of pathos that lends depth and complexity to his greatest films. With *Manhattan*, Allen was hailed as the consummate New York City filmmaker, celebrating the urban landscape with on-location cinematography, particularly favoring Manhattan's Central Park. However, with subsequent films shot in New York, some critics began to fault him for portraying a cleaned-up vision of the city, devoid of the poverty and crime typical of urban settings. Additionally, some criticized Allen for his failure to portray the racial and ethnic diversity of New York City, and while once praised for his knowing portraits of the social milieu of New York's cultural and intellectual elite, he was later faulted for expressing pretentious attitudes through his characters.

The public attention on Allen's personal life in 1992 marks a turning point in the tenor and focus critics have applied to the evaluation of his films. Many critics believe his relationship with Soon-Yi Previn and the accusations leveled at him have affected the critical appraisal for much of his subsequent work. Events from Allen's personal life have prompted reviewers to scrutinize his films for evidence of his psychological make-up and moral center. This tendency culminated in the critical reception for *Deconstructing Harry* (1997), which many viewed as a means by which Allen sought to justify his own questionable behavior by implying that the true artist is above morality. During the 1980s Allen was widely regarded as a writer of strong, intelligent, complex female characters. After 1992, however, critics began to note a tendency for Allen to cast himself in romantic lead roles coupled with women much younger than himself, which some found distasteful. Further, critics began to regard Allen's female characters and his representation of male-female relationships as an expression of a deep-seated misogyny, and asserted that he portrayed women as manipulative and controlling. Subsequently Allen began to write and direct more films in which he does not appear at all—such as *Bullets over Broadway* and *Celebrity*. Critics have noted, however, that, even when he does not appear as a protagonist in his own films, he usually chooses actors who embody the characteristic Woody Allen persona.

Allen's films of the 1990s marketed as light entertainment have been faulted by some reviewers, who assert these works do not live up to the standards Allen set for himself in earlier decades. Such critics found these films to be based on weak screenplays, lacking in humor, originality, or insight. Further, some reviewers noted that, while Allen's best films maintained a dark, edgy humor tempered by warmth and sincerity, more recent work expresses a cynicism devoid of humor or humanity. Others have disagreed, finding that Allen's latest films are successful purely as works of light comedy.

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

- From A to Z* [co-author] (play) 1960  
*What's New, Pussycat?* [screenwriter] (film) 1965  
*Don't Drink the Water* (play) 1966  
*What's Up, Tiger Lily?* [co-screenwriter with Frank Buxton, Len Maxwell, Louise Lasser, and Mickey Rose] (film) 1966  
*Play It Again, Sam* (play) 1969  
*Take the Money and Run* [co-screenwriter with Rose and director] (film) 1969  
*Bananas* [co-screenwriter with Rose; director] (film) 1971  
*Getting Even* (essays and short stories) 1971  
*Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex but Were Afraid to Ask* [screenwriter and director; based on the book by David Ruben] (film) 1972  
*Play It Again, Sam* [screenwriter] (film) 1972  
*Sleeper* [co-screenwriter with Marshall Brickman, and director] (film) 1973  
*Death: A Comedy in One Act* (play) 1975  
*God: A Comedy in One Act* (play) 1975  
*Love and Death* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1975  
*Without Feathers* (essays and short stories) 1975  
*Annie Hall* [co-screenwriter with Brickman, and director] (film) 1977  
*Interiors* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1978  
*Non-Being and Somethingness* [collected from the comic strip *Inside Woody Allen*] (comic strips) 1978  
*Manhattan* [co-screenwriter, with Brickman; director] (film) 1979  
*Side Effects* (humor collection) 1980  
*Stardust Memories* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1980  
*The Floating Lightbulb* (play) 1981  
*A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1982  
*Zelig* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1983  
*Broadway Danny Rose* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1984  
*The Purple Rose of Cairo* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1985

*Hannah and Her Sisters* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1986  
*Radio Days* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1987  
*September* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1987  
*Another Woman* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1988  
*Crimes and Misdemeanors* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1989  
*Oedipus Wrecks* [one of three films by various writer and directors in *New York Stories*] (film) 1989  
*Alice* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1990  
*The Complete Prose* (humor) 1991  
*Husbands and Wives* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1992  
*Shadows and Fog* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1992  
*The Illustrated Woody Allen Reader* (humor) 1993  
*Manhattan Murder Mystery* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1993  
*Bullets over Broadway* [co-screenwriter and director] (film) 1994  
*Death Defying Acts: Three One-Act Comedies* (play) 1995  
*Mighty Aphrodite* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1995  
*Woody Allen on Woody Allen: In Conversation with Stig Bjorkman* (interviews) 1995  
*Everyone Says I Love You* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1996  
*Deconstructing Harry* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1997  
*Celebrity* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1998  
*Sweet and Lowdown* [screenwriter and director] (film) 1999  
*Small Time Crooks* [screenwriter and director] (film) 2000  
*The Curse of the Jade Scorpion* [screenwriter and director] (film) 2001  
*Hollywood Ending* [screenwriter and director] (film) 2002  
*Anything Else?* [screenwriter and director] (film) 2003  
*Writer's Block* [includes *Riverside Drive* and *Old Saybrook*] (plays) 2003

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## CRITICISM

Nancy Pogel (essay date 1987)

SOURCE: Pogel, Nancy. "Humble Beginnings: The First 'Woody Allen' Films." In *Woody Allen*, pp. 33-54. Boston, Mass.: Twayne Publishers, 1987.

[In the following essay, Pogel examines three of Allen's earliest films, *Take the Money and Run*, *Bananas*, and *Play It Again, Sam*—commenting on the films' inspirations and critical receptions.]

The first three films that helped establish Woody Allen's reputation as a comic filmmaker, *Take the Money and Run* (1969), *Bananas* (1971), and *Play It Again, Sam* (1972), share several parallel patterns despite variations in narrative situation and setting. These films involve a meek central character, a reflexive context, and a dialogic, jokelike structure. The little man is tossed between two conflicting circumstances, the second of which often promises to be more rewarding than the first. Ultimately, however, neither situation proves satisfying; inevitably, the little man's encounter with a promising alternative only highlights its meaninglessness and the main character's foolishness and alienation—yet also, a third and more human possibility that he himself represents.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the more complicated and self-conscious little men in several of Allen's later films, the figure in these early movies is an innocent and humble victim. He serves to expose the anxieties and absurdities of contemporary life, to examine the threat such a life poses to coherent identity, and to reveal the problems in attempting to live up to heroic images born out of Hollywood fantasy. While filmic allusions suggest how significant visual impressions have been in creating unreliable contemporary values and behavior patterns, those same images also contribute to the little man's survival. Like many modern examples of American humor and comic film, Allen's early work evokes skepticism, but it is not without hope; Allen explores a double-edged view of American dreams and false illusions in terms of his own language and medium. Even in his earliest films, he recognizes that film is part of the problem it describes, and even his earliest films are more inconclusive than they may first appear to be.

Although *Play It Again, Sam* has a tighter, more conventional narrative line than the other two early comedies, all three films are episodic and filled with slapstick, one-liners, and comic shtick transposed from nightclub performance and literary production to film. Always a remarkable mimic of visual as well as verbal styles, Allen used visual puns and relied heavily on reflexive allusions and references in his earliest films, but unlike the later films, his early efforts are not the work of a sophisticated visual artist. The jokes take precedence over composition, lighting, color, and carefully controlled mise-en-scène; and the films' overall coherence and depth appear to be secondary to entertaining dialogue and relatively simple comic effects.

"THE JUNGLE IS NO PLACE FOR A CELLIST":  
*TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN.*

Neither the critics nor Woody Allen considered *What's New, Pussycat?* an artistically important movie, but it was such a commercial success that Allen's managers, Joffe and Rollins, were able to launch Allen as a direc-

tor, actor, and writer of his own films. After a year and a half of looking for the right situation, Charles Joffe finally sold the script for *Take the Money and Run* to Palomar Pictures, who put up \$1.6 million for its production and gave Allen the right to direct and star.<sup>2</sup> For his first film, Allen told Eric Lax, "I stayed with my safest stuff, which is the stuff I know: abject humility. I was very timid in that picture. But there was no way I could have been anything else. I had never made a film, I was never the star of a picture before."<sup>3</sup>

Allen, however, sought assistance. In addition to Joffe, who would produce, and Mickey Rose, who coauthored the script, Allen drew on the expertise of veteran cinematographer Lester Schorr, production manager Jack Grossberg, and Fred Gallo, who served as unit manager and right-hand man on this film. Allen also called upon editor Ralph Rosenblum, whose credits include *The Pawnbroker* (1965) and *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1962). Rosenblum, who would go on to edit *Bananas*, *Sleeper*, *Annie Hall*, and *Interiors*, was called in to save the film after screenings of a rough cut failed with trial audiences. Allen lacked confidence. As he put it later: "I had been too harsh on myself and lopped out gobs and gobs of material. His [Rosenblum's] big thing was to say, 'Put it back'"<sup>4</sup> Rosenblum believed the film's greatest problem was its uneven tone. He objected to the very combination of qualities that would characterize Allen's best films of the late seventies and eighties,—the pathos and seriousness that ran through what was supposed to be a comedy. Rosenblum especially disliked the ending, a bloody *Bonnie and Clyde* parody in which the little man was gunned down following a bank robbery. Rosenblum suggested a more upbeat conclusion.<sup>5</sup>

Allen claims to have thought seriously once about becoming a gangster. He said, "I never would have stopped trying to beat the law in the face of persistent defeat."<sup>6</sup> Before he began making *Take the Money and Run*, Allen had done a spoof of *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) with Liza Minnelli on the "Kraft Music Hall Comedy Hour." Later he would write a piece on organized crime for *Getting Even*, his first collection of humorous essays.<sup>7</sup> Allen notes that he was thinking about Dillinger when he made the film, but Allen's little man, with the meek first name Virgil, takes his last name, Starkwell, from Charles Starkweather, a notorious 1950s killer. Virgil takes his story not only from the lives of real gangsters, but from countless moving pictures—from *Little Caesar* (1930) to *Bonnie and Clyde*—that created the gangster-hero myths so endemic to the American imagination.

*Take the Money and Run* is a genre fantasy involving all of the American gangster film conventions. Within a pseudodocumentary frame, Jackson Beck, the film's narrator, provides a Movietone-newsreel grittiness with

his staccato voice-over that imitates the style of fifties films like *Walk East on Beacon* (1952). The narration, the newsreel-like footage, and the burlesque Pathe-style vignettes of Virgil's parents, his teacher, his cello instructor, his probation officer, and a fellow convict all spoof crime films' cinema vérité techniques. Other moments in the film parody a variety of gangster genre paradigms. Represented are biographies of single criminals, the 'bad-kid-grows-up-to-be-a-gangster' stories, the prison pictures, the organized crime movies, and the chain gang, big escape, and hostage films. In addition, *Take the Money* alludes to other films, such as *The Hustler* (1961) and *West Side Story* (1961), which lie on the outskirts of the genre.

But on each of the typical occasions drawn from gangster films, Virgil is far less than the macho masters of circumstances who have swaggered across American movie screens since James Cagney chucked his mother on the shoulder in *Public Enemy* (1931). Virgil Starkwell bungles one opportunity for stylish behavior after another. Virgil is no dapper young tough, who eludes the police and grows up to be a fearless criminal; he is a slight child with tousled red hair and freckles whose hands get stuck in the gumball machines he tries to rob. He violates all the old patterns: instead of being a Horatio Alger success, he fails as a young entrepreneur because he can't give a spit shoeshine without hitting his customer's trousers. He is not a frustrated artist led to crime, but a failure at mastering the cello—he blows into it. And he creates a classic moment of comic disorder when he attempts to perform sitting down in a marching band.

Unlike Paul Newman's Fast Eddy, Virgil plays an embarrassing game of pool. In a *West Side Story*-style street fight, Virgil's is the only switchblade that won't work. He is not the dapper, debonair hoodlum with a platinum blonde on his arm—he falls in love and marries a laundress, and on the day when he is preparing to rob a bank, squabbles with her over who has first rights to the bathroom. Even his bank robberies lack the élan of the classic robber: during his first attempt, the bank officials cannot read his holdup note. Appearing to say, "Apt natural I have a gub," the note highlights the little man's innocent use of language in contrast to sophisticated social protocol, and it leads to his imprisonment.

Neither of Virgil's options permits success or satisfies his desires. Attempting to be a criminal or attempting to go straight, Virgil's schlemiel persona is Allen's response to the romantic conventions of the classic American crime film. Virgil is victimized in prison by a treacherous shirt-folding machine in the laundry, by officials whose medical experiments turn him into a Hasidic rabbi, and by his fellow inmates, who don't bother to inform him that a planned escape is off and leave him outside the cell-block doors, banging to get back

in. When he tries to be Cool Hand Luke and escapes from a work gang, he must do so in lockstep with five other prisoners to whom he is chained. Allen is also playing off such films as *20,000 Years in Sing-Sing* (1933), *The Big House* (1930), *I Was a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932), *Dillinger* (1945), *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), and *The Defiant Ones* (1958) in his depiction of Virgil's failures to live up to the heroic images of dashing gangster types.

*Take the Money and Run*, like other early Allen films, finds a humble little-man main character caught between two unsavory possibilities. He is no freer outside than inside prison, and his confinement becomes a representative contemporary predicament, and in comic form refers to greater modern paradoxes than innocent Virgil ever consciously considers. Virgil's confinement also involves a reflexive burlesque context, a comment on films and filmmaking.

Virgil is confined not merely by worlds inside and outside prison, but by the rigid demands of the genre he finds himself in; however, while he epitomizes our propensity to glorify false illusions, he also re-creates our impotence in a comic fashion and represents our hopes. His frustration in the face of everything from stubborn shirt machines to conscientious cops lies well within the conventions of twentieth-century literary and filmic humor, wherein mechanical contrivances of the smallest sort and authority of any sort are the stuff that nightmares are made of. But against the rigidities of bands marching in orderly formation, depressing domestic problems, the deadly routine of prison life, or the requirements of formulaic genres and their desensitizing macho codes, Virgil Starkwell's disorderly ineptitude signifies antistructure and makes us laugh at our reluctance to acknowledge our own very human flaws.

A more significant affirmation lies in Virgil's persistence, derived from his innocence and his unknowing attempts to imitate Hollywood images. The same illusions that entrap him encourage him to believe in love, freedom, and survival. Although later little men will be far more self-conscious about time and aging, Virgil has as little sense of time's tyranny as he has of the limits suggested by Allen's metaphors of place. Even though he has been sentenced to eight hundred years in jail, and even though life outside jail provides no haven from adversity, Virgil refuses to give up. Despite several earlier unsuccessful attempts, at the end of *Take the Money and Run*, he is planning to escape from prison again. Although he failed before when a gun carved out of soap and painted with shoe polish (à la Dillinger) turned to suds in a rainstorm, we see Virgil whittling away at yet another bar of soap. Just as in the movies, he has no doubt that his next attempt will succeed. Virgil's naïveté makes him a victim, but it also presumes a

creator behind the character who still toys with the idea of renewal. Although Virgil's persistence clearly has its pathetic side, we see him endure because, like Don Quixote, he believes and acts upon his faith. The film is inconclusive about whether we should value Virgil's innocence or reject his illusions.

In carrying on dialogues with the social codes that have become literary, political, or filmic conventions, Woody Allen reflects on the sophistication of his day—textbook history, the social fantasies that underlie the genre, his audience, and the customs of his medium. The parody and the self-reflexive comedy in this early Allen film are handled so gently and with such a sense of familiarity with filmic conventions, however, that Allen doesn't just expose our failures to ridicule and unsympathetic laughter. *Take the Money and Run*, like later films from *Play It Again, Sam* to *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), implies that unrealistic figures created by the American film industry in complicity with an undiscerning audience may be damaging, but they are also woven into the American mythos as the fabric of hope. Paradoxically, they are related at once to our worst self-deceptions and to a modicum of genuine romantic faith that, like Jay Gatsby's dream, is difficult to abandon.

#### MORE JUNGLES IN BANANAS

The 1960s were the politically-intense years of Castro, revolts in South America, civil conflicts in the Dominican Republic, assassinations in the United States, and student unrest over civil rights and Vietnam. Woody Allen's second major film, *Bananas*, explores the issues of its times—politics, revolution, and violence—with surprising aggressiveness. In *Bananas*, the critical themes that are to interest Allen throughout his filmmaking career take on sharper definition. One of Woody Allen's major concerns is the individual's search for authenticity in the face of dehumanizing modern manners, ideologies, and technologies. Allen's film deals with contemporary living that fosters depersonalization, uniformity, alienation, and loneliness.

*Bananas*'s Fielding Mellish (Woody Allen), like Virgil Starkwell, is a humble little man. Like Virgil, he is interested in love, sex, and survival; however, the little soul's instinctive longing for an innocence that requires trust is in constant conflict with the painful realities of modern experience. Allen demands an open-eyed look at the world, a look that leads to doubt and militates against the modicum of faith that his main character unconsciously seeks to retain; but despite the odds against individual fulfillment, Fielding Mellish, like Allen's other littleman characters, is a reflection of his creator's best wishes. In *Bananas*, the media can desensitize and act as an analogue to both depersonalizing corporations that define the quality of work experience, and to power-hungry politicians who devalue life;