



Received: 2023/10/16
Accepted: 2023/12/31
Published: 2024/09/14

1. Assistant Professor of English Literature, Semnan University, Semnan, Iran. *. Corresponding Author.

Email: mousavimehdi@semnan.ac.ir



2. Graduate Student of English Language and Literature, Semnan University, Semnan, Iran.

Email: mohammad.masoodi97@gmail.com

How to cite this article:
Mousavi, S.M., & Masoodi Miyanrostaq, M. (2024). Humor as (Un-)Selfing in Woody Allen's Annie Hall, Manhattan and Hannah and Her Sisters. *The International Journal of Humanities* 31(3): 80–91.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Humor as (Un-)Selfing in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall*, *Manhattan* and *Hannah and Her Sisters*

Seyyed Mehdi Mousavi^{1*} , Mohammad Masoodi Miyanrostaq² 

This paper intends to examine Woody Allen's films from the perspective of Iris Murdoch's moral philosophy. By exploring the possible relationship between humor and unselfing, we try to highlight the moral dilemmas of the characters and the audience's ironic response to the use of humor. Focusing on three films (*Annie Hall*, *Manhattan*, and *Hanna and Her Sisters*), it is argued that the films depict morally complex scenarios where humor has a therapeutic function as well as a morally ambivalent one. In *Manhattan* and *Annie Hall*, Isaac and Alvy's form of self-deprecating humor does come off as self-love but it falls short of unselfing. Their self-love is only in the service of ego, while on the other hand, Mickey in *Hannah and Her Sisters*, and Tracy in *Manhattan* show how considering the singularity of other people's experience will help one unself. Mickey is the only character in these three movies that achieves unselfing through humor and the attendant detachment. If the audience is caught up in the ego trip of the characters, they will miss a whole other level of humor.

Keywords: Unselfing; Humor; Woody Allen; Films; Iris Murdoch.

Introduction

Woody Allen's filmography, as attested by Sandy Bates in *Stardust Memories* (1980), starts with an array of funny movies that usually rely on slapstick. By mid to the late 70s, the slapstick aspect of Allen's comedy wore off in favor of rather philosophical jokes. An internationally-recognized auteur-director, his films have invoked various interpretations. While the construction and effect of humor in Allen's films have been previously studied, rarely has it been considered in light of Iris Murdoch's notions of unself, attention, and love.

Copyright© 2024, TMU Press. This open-access article is published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License which permits Share (copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format) and Adapt (remix, transform, and build upon the material) under the Attribution-NonCommercial terms.

The long time Allen scholar, Sam B. Girgus, in *The Films of Woody Allen* (2002), states that Allen's humor involves self-deprecation and confessional discourse among other things that are indicative of his intensity of authenticity (5). It seems that "self-deprecation" can be reinterpreted as ironic unselfing. Moreover, a discussion of love in Allen's films might bring to the mind the conflicted nature of male-female relationships and the frequent narcissistic tendencies of characters (usually played by Allen himself) in their dismissive attitudes toward their partners. Many of the main characters in Allen's films avoid the other by relying on self-protective humor. To critically examine this moral indifference, Murdoch's philosophy can be of great help.

Gregg Bachman in "Crimes and Misdemeanors: Reflections on Reflexivity" addresses Allen's humor as a routine that entails the "powers of disjunctive comparison" and "ironic Hegelian dialectics" (171). The disjunction is shown to be the result of juxtaposing a rational-logical mindset with an irrational-playful one. In Allen's films, playfulness and emotional detachment are intertwined. For Morreall, whose work on the philosophy of humor remains a constant point of reference, one similarity between philosophy and humor is detachment. Accordingly, the comedian and the philosopher look at everyday experience from a higher-than-normal perspective. Such a perspective is at the heart of stand-up routines (Morreall, 127). To further explore the significance of detachment in humorous discourse, we might mention the distinction Davenport makes between the authentic and the serious individual. In this view, the serious-minded individual will find it very hard to take a distance from their beliefs and laugh at themselves. On the other hand, the authentic individual knows that their values and commitments are constantly changing and are thus based on what one has been contingently presented with (171). In many ways, the authentic individual is an ironist. Bernstein argues that irony – at least a certain type of it – involves disorientation, that is, an uncanniness that transforms the subject (8). Ironism is for Richard Rorty the healthy mindset necessary for the flourishing of democracy. To resist final vocabularies, ironic detachment is encouraged in his political philosophy. However, this might undermine the possibility of sympathy.

Lydia Amir in *Philosophy, Humor, and the Human Condition: Taking Ridicule Seriously* (2019) calls for reflection and detachment, the type of reflection that leads to an understanding of the human condition (98). Amir seeks to show that the limitation and contradiction within the self and the world which constitute the human condition are not to be solved or ignored but accepted (141). This acquiescence of self is the mark of what makes up Amir's notion of *Homo risiblis*, which suggests the essential ridiculousness of human beings. This is meant to be a celebration because it permits the embracing of human finitude (153). Accordingly, tragedy or comedy alone cannot be the response to the human condition and both should be surpassed (129). Amir maintains that the tragic is exclusive while comedy is inclusive, and that is why humor can be the saving grace to liberate us from the binary. The inclusivity of humor means that it can contain and then surpass both comedy and tragedy (176). Humor, furthermore, "brings about a harmonious state and a serene joy that rivals the highest philosophic and

religious ideals, revealing itself as redemptive” (151). For Amir, the understanding of the self as ridiculous is a redemptive truth (135). She goes as far as to say that it is even more ridiculous when we do not recognize our ridiculousness (153). Here we might ask: do Allen’s characters excessively recognize their ridiculousness?

Amir regards self-awareness as self-betterment because there is no self-deception or misplaced feelings of superiority involved (130). In this situation, one does not see the need to alleviate the pain of contradiction, as she states:

The person who laughs transcends his ridiculous humanity with dignity, as the acceptance of contradiction rids any need for interpretation that either alleviates or attempts to interpret the pain of conflicting desires and the impossibility of fulfillment. To use the language of redemption, we redeem ourselves by embracing our defining ridiculousness. (136)

The inclusivity of humor transcends both the tragic and the comic, and by liberating us from restraining dichotomies, functions as a therapeutic strategy. It has also the potential to foster friendship and sympathy (142). Undoubtedly, humor contributes to human flourishing. Some questions arise: does self-referential humor signify self-love? How could we align the Murdochian notion of love with Amir’s thesis of self-referential humor? How can the concept of good, as understood by Murdoch, be inferred from humor? In terms of the purposes of the present essay, does humor create unselfing in Allen’s selected films?

Murdoch’s Notion of Love/Unselfing

Murdoch’s idea of humor and the good type of absurd are intimated as a strategy for unselfing. She has a special care for such values as the good, attention, and love. In one of her essays, “The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists” (1976), she argues that absurdist humor, especially in art, may lead to the moral good. By trying to reinterpret Plato’s antagonism towards laughter, Murdoch writes, “of course there is a bad absurd (degrading, hurtful), but is there not also a good absurd? Loss of dignity need not be loss of moral stature, can be surrender of vanity, discovery of humility; and a sense of the ludicrous is a defense against pretensions, not least in art” (448).

The description of the good kind of absurd by Murdoch is reminiscing of characters that Allen plays in his comedies. In the films, the fourth wall dissolves, and a meta-dramatic self-targeted humor is affected. Gordon notes that bad art pulls us away from reality and distracts us with fantasy while the good art deals with the real (118). Thus, a good absurd confronts the real. Usually, this kind of absurd confronts the real in a way that creates humor.

Murdoch’s notion of confronting the real takes its place in the dichotomy of real versus fantasy (Bolton 107). It is certainly hard to turn away from images on the cave wall and look for the sun, as Plato assumed. The idea of attention on the other hand, prepares one to look again and differently. To confront the real, one needs to pay attention to minute details of reality (Panizza 6). The notion of attention holds a unique place in Murdoch’s philosophy; attention, not just as in a rigorous look of what is real, but a rigorous look outwards. Murdoch wants us to do away with the egoistic self. According to her, love is the event of experiencing beauty, a

beauty which is disinterested, as when a self-obsessed person is suddenly distracted by the flight of a kestrel – a hypothetical scenario to explain moral imagination. This attentiveness to the other is what she calls unselfing. Characters played by Allen, tend to be narcissistic and delusional, fluctuating between reality and fantasy. While a comparison of Murdoch's fictional works and Allen's films may concentrate on "lack of communication, misunderstanding, and loneliness suggesting the otherness of people" (Banifatemi & Sokhanvar 36) as thematic threads, the present essay relies rather on Murdoch the philosopher, not the fiction writer, to attend to the moral possibilities of humor.

Annie Hall and Hannah

Girgus argues that many of Allen's films depict the tension caused by the absence of an absolute moral order ("Afterword" 559-561). A case in point is Mickey in *Hanna and Her Sisters*, who directs his attention to death, quite obsessively, to apparently fill in the void of moral certainty. Reality turns into trauma against which anything is summoned as survival tools, including a dark Nietzschean laughter (Mickey keeps mocking Nietzsche though).

As previously mentioned, Allen's humor is chiefly constituted of detachment and reflection. Sayad notes the similarity between Allen's comic figures and Bakhtin's understanding of the fool. In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Bakhtin maintains that the fool functions as "the other", and has thus the potential to speak the truth (161). Sayad refers to various characters in Allen's films, played by himself, to prove this point; characters like the court-jester in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex * But Were Afraid to Ask* (1972), Boris in *Love and Death* (1975) and Alvy Singer in *Annie Hall* (1977). The stand-up comedian, as a modern metamorphosis of the fool, directs attention to the present moment (Sayad, 26). The court-jester in Allen's film quips somewhere that "I like anything I can get without a prescription". In *Love and Death*, Boris directly addresses the audience more than once, challenging some of the stand-up conventions. In the same vein, *Annie Hall* begins with a direct address to the audience, using jokes. These examples demonstrate the use of detachment and reflection. While present in the setting of the movie, just as in life, detachment and reflection display the estranged quality that is inherent in everything. It should be obvious that detachment and reflection can provoke unselfing, if not in the characters, at least in the audience. To unself is to resist egoism.

In *Annie Hall*, Alvy's world revolves around himself. Sander H. Lee in *Eighteen Woody Allen films Analyzed: Anguish, God and Existentialism* (2014) posits that many characters in Allen's films exhibit this quality. Lee maintains that since the movie revolves around Alvy, it is then "a series of therapy sessions with Alvy Singer (Woody Allen) as the patient and the audience as analysts" (62). Lee highlights the oscillating mood of Alvy between arrogantly self-confident and submissive self-hatred. When Alvy is self-confident, like the first scene with Annie, she justly points out his self-centeredness, which does not waver at all even by the end of the movie. Alvy wants to be the only one at the center of attention; therefore, when the

unnamed professor in the waiting line is talking about Fellini, Beckett and Marshall McLuhan, he is agitated. The subsequent scene in the film can be considered the epitome of Alvy's self-centeredness. Although this scene is funny at first glance because McLuhan dismisses the nameless professor, another interpretation could come from Alvy's undying need for unceasingly being right. In a Murdochian sense, the first interpretation is not concerned with unselfing but the second interpretation, through negation, can offer us unselfing. On the first level, what is funny is the dichotomy of Alvy crushing the nameless professor while he is so full of himself, and boastful of the validity of his opinions. This interpretation, which is an example of situational irony, does not concern itself with unselfing. However, in the second interpretation, the dichotomy changes between Alvy's insistence of being right so much so that he would bring in the real McLuhan to prove his point. Alvy is a character who would comment on everything. As with other examples of situational irony, it cannot in and of itself be a tool for unselfing. However, situational irony enables contrastive perspective-taking.

In *Love and Death*, Boris (the character played by Allen) in a voiceover talks about how their surf did not show up for dinner after trying to set up a lightning rod the night before. When his mother is checking on their surf, she talks to his ashes: "What is it, Old Nehamkin? You're not looking well. Are you okay? You feel all right?" We laugh, but in terms of unselfing, this scene offers us nothing. When Alvy in *Annie Hall* states that he was a reasonably happy kid, his mother contradicts him by talking to an analyst, saying that he has been depressed. Again, we laugh because of how our expectation is dissolved in the face of the disparity between the two statements, but it does not entail any kind of unselfing. Therefore, while the first interpretation is always present, the content establishes the possibility of the second interpretation, and this is no guarantee that this interpretation helps the character unself.

Murdoch in the same essay asks of the audience to take on the task of seeking the real as much as the artist does; "to be disciplined enough to see as much reality in the work as the artist has succeeded in putting into it" (354). Does watching a film prepare us for seeing reality? Alvy is represented in all his petulant glory and irritating egoism. The ironic aesthetic distance enables the audience to look differently and laugh at others and possibly ourselves. This type of laughter needs not to be out of superiority. As Murdoch suggests, "sad, absurd, repulsive or even evil can be seen in a light of justice and mercy (355). Thus, Alvy's acts, his tantrums that stem from misogyny, god-complex, inferiority complex, etc. can be seen from this vantage point. Detachment is a key here. Murdoch writes:

It is important too that great art teaches us how real things can be looked at and loved without being seized and used, without being appropriated into the greedy organism of the self. This exercise of detachment is difficult and valuable whether the thing contemplated is a human being or the root of a tree or the vibration of a colour or a sound. (354)

Intense emotional response to characters on the screen is tempered with ironic distance, creating the chance for reflection. At any rate, attention to something other than ourselves is at

the heart of the filmic experience. This Murdochian attention allows us to get closer to the concept of good. As she puts it:

The Good itself is not visible. Plato pictured the good man as eventually able to look at the sun. I have never been sure what to make of this part of the myth. While it seems proper to represent the Good as a centre or focus of attention, yet it cannot quite be thought of as a 'visible' one in that it cannot be experienced or represented or defined. We can certainly know more or less where the sun is; it is not so easy to imagine what it would be like to look at it. (358)

It is worth mentioning that Plato's "allegory of the cave" with which Murdoch is concerned here is comparable to cinema, that is, to the filmic experience. What matters in the cinematic allegory is the flourishing of moral imagination not just by seeing images, but by also imagining something invisible. In this sense, aesthetic experience is already unselfing enough in that it encourages putting ourselves in others' shoes.

We should once again emphasize Alvy's selfishness in *Annie Hall*. Throughout the movie, he tries to mold Annie in his own image. For example, he takes her to the movie that he likes to see or encourages her to go to college and take certain courses to expand her knowledge. Despite this encouragement, Alvy calls one of the courses Annie takes "Contemporary Crisis in Western Man" because he is upset with her behavior, while the name of the course is "Existential Motifs in Russian Literature". Elsewhere in the film, Alvy asks Annie not to smoke marijuana before they have sex because it ruins the experience for him. Lee considers Annie's protest as a resistance to losing her individuality (82). Although Annie has taken one puff, she needs more. This results in Annie splitting into two parts, body and what the script names "Annie's spirit". Alvy complains that he would not consider it a successful act if Annie were high or not completely intact (both body and spirit as one). Alvy admits that he sees Annie as an audience that must be pleased without interference of drugs. The scene is fraught with humorous contradictions. With all his purported intellectualism, Alvy cannot accept or consider anything or anyone outside his perspective, so he cannot and would not unself. This type of selfish thinking is even present in his disdain of California and love of New York. Lee states that "New York accentuates one's sense of persecution and awareness of life's final futility" (71) while moving to Los Angeles would be to "abandon both the best and worst elements of civilized human life. It would be a betrayal of the human obligation to deal "face to face" with one's deepest anxieties" (71). His disdain of Los Angeles is so strong that he gets nauseous when he is in the city. One could even conclude that Alvy's obsession with death and despair stops him from looking at anything without putting himself first.

In regards to self-referential humor, Amir links this feature to self-love (82-83). Alvy's mood swings leads him to judge everyone as harshly as himself. Amir points out that "we condemn in others what we should combat in ourselves" (224). Alvy's self-deprecating jokes speak less of unselfing than egoism. In one scene with his first wife Allison, he is using the assassination of JFK (John F. Kennedy, the US president) as an alibi not to sleep with her. When Allison confronts him about it, Alvy reflects that his self-hatred might be the reason why he is turning

her down. He is indeed unable to attend to Allison. This lack of outward attention is what makes this relationship and Alvy's relationship with Annie unsuccessful.

Allison protests earlier in the scene that she is getting tired of Alvy's tactic of putting off sex to discuss the president's assassination, as she needs Alvy's attention. Attention is something that Alvy only wants for himself and therefore he is unable to unself. But the audience can and should take note of his behavior. Alvy's self-centeredness can also be seen when the movie is showing us a split screen of Annie and Alvy's therapy session. He says to his therapist: "She's making progress and I'm not making any progress. Her progress is defeating my progress". The self-centered position of Alvy is once again a source of humor. His selfishness extends to the end of the movie; after Annie and he meet again, while Alvy is respectful towards her, he takes solace in knowing that he molded her into liking *The Sorrow and The Pity* (1969) (the movie that they would frequently watch). Vittorio Hösle, the German-Italian philosopher, notes the very same thing about Alvy's behavior, but he falls short of relating it to the notion of unselfing. As far as Hösle is concerned, Alvy wants to make Annie love him, by educating her (45). Alvy's claim of consolation victory over how Annie has dragged his new boyfriend to see the movie, considering Murdoch's notion of unselfing, becomes funny and a source of unselfing for the audience. Alvy, on the other hand, cannot view his humor as self-love and misses Amir's and Murdoch's point. However, as demonstrated, the audience can detach themselves from such a position.

In *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986), Frederick (a recluse painter, played by Max von Sydow) shuts himself to the world and refuses to engage with people. Both Frederick and Alvy cling to their personal fantasies. As demonstrated by Murdoch, personal fantasy, whatever it entails, is the antithesis of attention. Anna-Lova Olsson in "A Moment of Letting Go: Iris Murdoch and the Morally Transformative Process of Unselfing" (2018), focuses on the egocentric individual who creates a fantasy world, "like a veil that dulls one's interests in the surrounding world" (167). Alvy feels the need to be constantly approved by others, while Frederick is the opposite. Frederick wants to be liked by everyone.

The argument for unselfing by means of humor can be made for Mickey in the same movie. The early humor we see involves him either against a machine or someone that acts like a machine, i.e., doctors who are more interested in extracting and delivering information with little attention to human emotions. Later, we see Mickey struggle with the concept and reality of death. He tries to give meaning to his life and turns to different religions. The comedy that ensues here, which usually involves zingers on different sect of a religion, religious people, philosophy or literature, rarely challenges Mickey to unself. The moment of unselfing comes at a particular moment in the movie, which is Mickey's breakthrough moment. This breakthrough is achieved by first enduring a great trauma of staring death right down the barrel. His struggles lead him to put the gun to his head but since he is so tense and consumed by his thought when the gun accidentally goes off, he decides it is better to go on a walk. After a great deal of walking,

he goes to his real shrine, the cinema. He relaxes and watches the Marx Brothers' *Duck Soup* (1933) and has this to say about his breakthrough to Holly:

I'm watching these people up on the screen, and I started getting hooked on the film, you know, and I started to feel, "How could you even think of killing yourself, I mean, isn't it so stupid? I mean, look at all the people up there on the screen, you know, they're real funny, and what if the worst is true? What if there's no God, and you only go around once and that's it? You know, don't you want to be part of the experience? You know, it's not all a drag," and I'm thinking to myself, "Jeez! I should stop ruining my life searching for answers I'm not ever going to get, and just enjoy it while it lasts!" And, after ... who knows? I mean, you know, maybe there really is something, nobody really knows! I know "maybe" is a very slim reed to hang your whole life on, but it's the best we have! And I actually began to enjoy myself!

Therefore, not only the audience can see the value of unselfing, but so can Mickey. For the first time his attention is outward. Earlier in the same scene, he attests that he has seen the movie many times since he was a kid, but this time, it is different. Here the detachment and subsequently the humor helps him to see the same thing differently. Art indeed works as a channel for moral amelioration. Lloyd Michaels mentions the power of the movie and how it can transcend the genre and affect Mickey in such a grand way (117). In light of Amir's notion of inclusivity of humor, we can reframe the transcendence which humor brings about.

Manhattan

Morality takes the center stage in *Manhattan*. The movie starts in a voice-over where we do not know yet that Allen's voice is himself or a character (much like *Annie Hall*, but this time, the audience are the readers of the book and not immediately the moviegoer). The voice is deliberating over the quality of an opening, which we come to understand is for a book. Although at one instance the voice says "I wanna sell some books here", these are only commercial choices. The notion of integrity is what Isaac also questions in the beginning with one of the openings being about the decay of urban life and values.

After the infamous opening of the movie, Allen's character, Isaak or Ike, switches Yale's conversation about how art can be a mediator for life to one about courage, specifically courage to save a life. He talks about how he cannot resist holding a cigarette in his hands because he looks very handsome with it. When his girlfriend, Tracy, is in the restroom, Ike talks about how morally wrong it is to date a 17-year-old when he himself is 42. Later, Ike reveals to Mary that he would never kiss her while she was with Yale, although Yale and Mary are having an affair. Does any of this have any bearing on the concept of humor and its relation to unselfing?

Ike really comes to grasp the notion of attention in his romantic relationships when he understands that he has lost Mary to Yale and that Tracy is also out of his reach. When he is recording himself on "why is life worth living", he comes to appreciate Tracy's face, although they are no longer together. This attention, which is the result of being away from the object of desire, is hardly humorous. Tom Shone in *Woody Allen: A Retrospective* (2015), calls *Manhattan* a more jaded movie in terms of its humor in comparison to *Annie Hall* (71). As a result, there is fewer chances to see if unselfing can happen for the characters through humor.

On the other hand, a late addition to the movie, the scene in which Ike confronts Yale about getting back together with Mary, revolves around morality, and it is not devoid of humor. Ike marches towards Yale's university to the tune of "Love is Sweeping the Country - Land of the Gay Caballero" to confront him about Mary which immediately changes the tone of the scene from serious to light-hearted. Isaac and Yale go to a room so they can talk. Isaac starts off:

IKE: What are you telling me? That you're gonna leave Emily and run away with the... the winner of the Zelda Fitzgerald Emotional Maturity Award?

...

YALE: I'm not a saint, OK?

IKE: You're too easy on yourself. Don't you see? You're... You rationalise everything. You're not honest with yourself. You talk about you wanna write a book, but in the end you'd rather buy a Porsche. You cheat a little bit on Emily and you play around the truth with me. The next thing you know you're in front of a Senate committee naming names.

YALE: You are so self-righteous. I mean, we're just people. We're just human beings. You think you're God!

IKE: I gotta model myself after someone.

YALE: You just can't live the way you do. It's all so perfect.

IKE: Jesus, what are future generations gonna say about us? My God! You know, someday we're gonna be like him. And he was probably one of the beautiful people, dancing and playing tennis. And now look. This is what happens to us. You know, it's important to have some kind of personal integrity. I'll be hanging in a classroom one day and I wanna make sure when I thin out that I'm... well thought of.

When Ike exclaims that he must model himself after somebody, we feel that he is not very serious. The irony that the sentence contains highlights Isaac's lack of attention. Isaac only begins to act when he gets hurt. He is insecure as a person because he feels emasculated when his wife leaves him for another woman. This could be seen as the reason he is dating a seventeen-year-old. In this case, he can mold his partner easier into something that he can control. He also feels threatened by his ex-wife's partner so he takes offense at his son doing painting (something that his wife's partner does).

Isaac dismisses Tracy as immature and keeps her at arm's length when it comes to Tracy's feelings towards him. While she is depicted as emotionally more mature than Mary, Isaac comes to realize this only after he loses Mary. Again, the lack of outward attention by Isaac can be the source of humor when he states that he models himself after God. Therefore, humor can be used as a means for unselfing. This unselfing can be detected by the audience because of the ironic detachment they can deploy. On the other hand, the characters do not always see themselves ironically so unselfing does not occur. We only get to see the sense of regret Isaac feels, when he talks about Tracy's face as he is numerating what makes life worth living. As Michaels notes in "Woody Allen's Cinema of Regret" there is a shallowness about characters that Allen plays even though they are well read and often work successful jobs (475). Similar to Alvy, Isaac is completely self-regarding in the sphere of moral economy, be it a romantic relationship or otherwise. Even when Isaac says to Mary that he would never make a move on her while she

was with Yale, there is a hint of moral victory for Isaac, as he later beats Yale to it with the curious fact that he “models himself” after God.

Michaels mentions how in the last scene of the movie, all the moral high ground that Isaac had fades away in favor of begging Tracy to take him back because he says that he made a mistake. Isaac in this scene has become the person who is “too easy on himself (472)”. He asks her not to act so mature while he is berating Yale that he wants to run away with the winner of Zelda Fitzgerald maturity award. Julia Driver in “Love and Unselfing in Iris Murdoch” (2020) states that “it is through unselfing that we come to acquire knowledge of the Good, and make ourselves morally better people” (169). Isaac’s change of heart, rather than informed unselfing, is merely self-serving. There should be a conviction in admitting to a mistake that shows one has gained perspective when one claims it but we see no such thing in Isaac’s plea. Driver mentions how one must consider others’ contexts to see them fully and justly (172). Tracy suggests that “not everybody gets corrupted”, further showing the gap between herself and Isaac. Isaac’s insistence on keeping Tracy confirms his lack of attention.

Earlier, Murdoch’s and Olsson’s insistence on letting go of egocentricity was mentioned in relation to Fredrick and Alvy. Here, we can apply it to Isaac as he says, “I just don’t want that thing about you that I like to change”. Isaac does not unself despite all the humor we as audience see in his self-obsessions.

Conclusion

The notion of unselfing and humor, although at first an odd couple, complement each other in specific moral scenarios, as we see with different characters in *Annie Hall*, *Hannah and Her Sisters*, and *Manhattan*. Since most of the characters played by Allen are narcissists who fail to recognize their self-centeredness, they also miss on the chance to find it funny and morally unself. In *Manhattan* and *Annie Hall*, Isaac and Alvy’s form of self-deprecating humor does come off as self-love but it falls short of unselfing. Their self-love is only in the service of ego, while on the other hand, Mickey in *Hannah and Her Sisters*, and Tracy in *Manhattan* show how taking into account the singularity of other people’s experience will help one unself. Mickey is the only character in these three movies that achieves unselfing through humor and detachment. If the audience is caught up in the ego trip of the characters, they will miss a whole other level of humor. A Murdochian moral perspective on the use of humor in interpersonal communication has indeed brought to the fore the pitfalls and salvaging possibilities of humor as both a strategy of avoiding reality and a chance for human flourishing.

References

- [1] Amir, Lydia (2019). *Philosophy, Humor, and the Human Condition: Taking Ridicule Seriously*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- [2] Bachman, Gregg (2013). “Crimes and Misdemeanors: Reflections on Reflexivity.” In *A Companion to Woody Allen*, edited by Peter J. Bailey and Sam B. Girgus. Wiley-Blackwell, Pp. 170-187.
- [3] Bakhtin, M. M., (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. University of Texas Press.

- [4] Banifatemi, Malihe al-Sadat, Sokhanvar, Jalal (2020). “Unreliable Narrators Suffering from Trauma in Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Nausea* and Iris Murdoch’s *Under the Net*.” *The International Journal of Humanities*, 27: 4, Pp. 32-41.
- [5] Bernstein, Richard J., (2016). *Ironic Life*. Polity.
- [6] Bolton, Lucy (2019). *Contemporary Cinema and the Philosophy of Iris Murdoch*. Edinburgh UP.
- [7] Davenport, Manuel M., (1976). “Presidential Address: An Existential Philosophy of Humor.” *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy*, 7:1, Pp. 169–76.
- [8] Driver, Julia (2020). “Love and Unselfing in Iris Murdoch.” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements*, 87:1, Pp. 169–180.
- [9] Girgus, Sam B., (2013). “Afterword: The Abyss: Woody Allen on Love, Death, and God.” in *Companion to Woody Allen*, edited by Peter J. Bailey and Sam B. Girgus. Wiley Blackwell, Pp. 559- 572.
- [10] -----(2002). *The Films of Woody Allen*. Cambridge UP.
- [11] Gordon, David J., (1990). “Iris Murdoch’s Comedies of Unselfing.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, 36:2, Pp. 115–36.
- [12] Hösle, Vittorio (2007). *Woody Allen: An Essay on the Nature of the Comical*. University of Notre Dame Press.
- [13] Lee, Sander H., (2014). *Eighteen Woody Allen Films Analyzed: Anguish, God and Existentialism*. McFarland & Company.
- [14] Morreall, John (2009). *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- [15] Michaels, Lloyd (2015). “Woody Allen’s Cinema of Regret.” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*. 32: 5, Pp. 469-481.
- [16] ----- (2017). *Sweet and Lowdown: Woody Allen’s Cinema of Regret*. Columbia UP.
- [17] Murdoch, Iris (1999). “The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists.” *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, edited by Peter J. Conradi. Penguin.
- [18] Olsson, Anna-Lova (2018). “A Moment of Letting Go: Iris Murdoch and the Morally Transformative Process of Unselfing.” *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 52:, Pp. 163–177.
- [19] Panizza, Silvia Caprioglio (2022). *The Ethics of Attention: Engaging the Real with Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil*. Routledge.
- [20] Sayad, Cecilia (2011). “The Auteur as Fool: Bakhtin, Barthes, and the Screen Performances of Woody Allen and Jean-Luc Godard.” *Journal of Film and Video*, 63: 4, Pp. 21- 34.
- [21] Shone, Tom (2016). *Woody Allen: A Retrospective*. Palazzo.



شوخی طبیعی به مثابه خودزدایی در فیلم‌های وودی الن (انی) هال، منهن، هانا و خواهرانش

سید مهدی موسوی*^{ID}، محمد مسعودی میانرُستاق^{ID}

چکیده

این مقاله به بررسی فیلم‌های وودی الن از نگاه فلسفه اخلاق آریس مرداک می‌پردازد. با کاویدن رابطه شوخی طبیعی و خودزدایی، ما بغرنج‌های اخلاقی کاراکترهای فیلم و نیز واکنش آبرونیک مخاطب به کارکرد طنز را برجسته کرده‌ایم. بررسی سه فیلم برگزیده (انی هال، منهن، هانا و خواهرانش) نشان می‌دهد که ما با سناریوهای اخلاقی پیچیده‌ای سروکار داریم که در آن‌ها شوخی طبیعی افزون بر کارکردی روان‌درمانی، از لحاظ اخلاقی نقشی مبهم دارد. در فیلم‌های منهن و انی هال، ایزاک و آلوی درست است که شوخی طبیعی خود-سرزنش‌گرایانه‌ای دارند اما کم پیش می‌آید خودخواه نباشند. خودپسندی این دو در تضاد با دو کاراکتر دیگر در فیلم‌های هانا و خواهرانش و منهن است. از میان این چند کاراکتر، تنها میکی است که یک نوع خودزدایی اخلاقی از طریق شوخی طبیعی و بی‌اعتنایی به دست می‌آورد. نکته مهم این است که مخاطب با دیدن بازنمایی خودمداری در این فیلم‌ها می‌تواند لایه‌های زیرین شوخی طبیعی را دریابد.

کلیدواژگان: خودزدایی؛ شوخی طبیعی؛ وودی الن؛ آریس مرداک.

۱. استادیار گروه زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی،
دانشگاه سمنان، سمنان، ایران.

* نویسنده مسئول

Email:

mousavimehdi@semnan.ac.ir

۲. دانش‌آموخته زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی،

دانشگاه سمنان، سمنان، ایران.

Email:

mohammad.masoodi97@gmail.com