

PARODY AND METAFICTION IN WOODY ALLEN'S *MIGHTY APHRODITE*

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ABSTRACT

Woody Allen constantly employs parody and metafiction as means of achieving comic effects in his films. He often uses metafiction by playing «himself», the schizophrenic insecure Jew with black-rimmed glasses, and by letting events of his private life enter his films. In this way, the boundaries between fiction and real life are blurred. Parody is also present in his films through the exaggeration and de-contextualisation of Hollywood films, genre conventions, and/or his own film techniques, the so-called «Allenist devices». Bearing in mind these characteristic strategies of Allen's style, my paper focuses on *Mighty Aphrodite*, since it is one of the films that best employs both parody and metafiction and that best encompasses Allen's style and spirit as an «auteur».

A lot of literary criticism has been made on concepts such as parody and metafiction. These topics became especially fashionable in the course of the 1980s, especially through well-known critics such as Patricia Waugh, Linda Hutcheon and Margaret A. Rose. This last critic wrote a book called *Parody/Metafiction* in 1979, where both terms were connected. Rose maintains that the role

of parody is that of a «meta-fictional mirror to fiction» (1979: 13). Parody is then a form of metafiction and cannot be separated from that nature, however, not all metafiction is a kind of parody for her. Both strategies have served the purpose of expanding the corpus of fiction. This view of parody and metafiction as working together was further developed by Waugh, who in 1984 released her famous book *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. In her book, metafiction and parody also run close together, so much so that drawing boundaries between the two becomes an extremely difficult task. She states that both techniques serve a similar purpose, that of «“defamiliarizing” fictional conventions that have become both automatized and inauthentic, and to release new and more authentic forms» (1984: 65). For her, metafiction and parody do not necessarily work together but since they have similar aims, it is not difficult to find them together in artistic manifestations. All in all, she does make some important differences. She defines metafiction as «a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality» (1984: 2).

What metafiction does is what the formalists have called «laying bare the device»¹. Instead of art hiding its construction, the construction is shown, reflecting its artificiality. This leads to an exploration of the problematic relationship between life and fiction. The concept has been especially used in some manifestations of Postmodernism. It brings a pessimistic mood to the works because we seem to be trapped by our own constructions, both in fiction and in reality. The ordered reality and fiction (the well-made plot, the chronological sequence, the rational connection between what characters ‘do’ and what they ‘are’...) are questioned and rejected, producing a climate of confusion and in some instances a pervading pessimistic mood. Luckily enough, even though the aim may be serious the effect can also be comic. In fact, it is worth noticing that both parody and metafiction are not always understood as something negative and pessimistic. Both can be used with a comic aim in mind and they can be the source of hilarious comedies.

Waugh’s definition seems to be directed towards written forms, however, it can also be applied to the cinematic mode of narration. Waugh points out that one of the causes for this interest in metafiction may be the historical period in which we live. She considers it to be singularly uncertain, insecure, self-questioning and culturally pluralistic (1984: 6). Cinema, like literature, is

¹ In Victor Shklovsky’s famous study of Sterne’s novel *Tristram Shandy* in (LEMON and REIS, 1965: 25-57), he uses the concept «laying bare the device» to refer to Sterne’s practice of presenting devices without any realistic motivation, they are presented purely *as devices*.

not immune to the cultural manifestation of its production. This is the reason for the renewed interest that cinema manifests in the use of parodic and metafictional techniques. This use of parody and metafiction is especially present in Woody Allen's production. Uncertain, insecure, self-questioning... could be adjectives not only used to describe the historical period in which we live but also to describe Woody Allen's private and artistic persona. Maybe it is his own character that has attracted Allen towards a kind of fiction, or rather metafiction, that is as uncertain and self-questioning as the characters he usually plays and as his own public persona. As explained later, many of Allen's works such as *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1984) or *Annie Hall* (1977) are highly metafictional, where boundaries inside the films themselves are blurred. Allen is also fond of other kind of metafiction outside the diegetic² world of his films. His private persona and his diegetic one are blurred in many of his films, when he seems to be playing the same role as he does in his life. *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995) is an especially interesting film because it combines these two kinds of metafiction.

The other kind of literary and cinematic device Allen uses is that of parody. Parody is a device in which a set of fictional conventions are undermined because they have become automated. Time, repetition and use make conventions become undynamic: the aim of the parodist is to give a new dynamism to the obsolete forms in order to create new ones. Some years ago, Linda Hutcheon offered one of the most well-known definitions of parody. For her, parody is «repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity» (1991: 6). This definition has not gone without criticism. Scholars such as Margaret A. Rose have insisted on not forgetting the «distinguishing peculiarity of parody as a comic form of «double coding»» (1993: 239). However, Hutcheon's definition has the advantage of being general enough to admit parody's wide range of intent, from the ironic and playful to the scornful and ridiculing.

Woody Allen, being a comic as he is, has used a kind of parody that comes closer to Rose's definition. Rose underlines the function of parody as «comic refunctioning of the work's performed material» (1993: 92). For her, parody aims at achieving comic effects, mainly through exaggeration and decontextualisation. *Mighty Aphrodite* does precisely that, it parodies the conventions of the Greek Tragedy and at the same time, those of the classical Hollywood cinema.

² The terms diegesis and diegetic are used by Genette in the sense of «story» (1987: 27), referring to the narrative context. The diegetic world would be the world of the story narrated, the extradiegetic one would be the one outside the story. The director of a film is usually extradiegetic, while the characters of a story are diegetic or intradiegetic. When the boundaries between diegesis and extradiegesis are blurred metafiction is produced.

Both parody and metafiction can be used to achieve comic effects, complementing each other to obtain new results. After all, the 20th century has proved to be a period in which tradition has been searched to achieve new «original effects» both in cinema and literature. It has been argued that today's films simply re-cycle yesterday's films as pastiche, that genres are re-invented, that «new Hollywood» is «old Hollywood». This nostalgia is especially seen in costume dramas, heritage films and in the remakes that flood every year's Hollywood market. Woody Allen is not an exception to this trend, however, since he does not only look at past historic, artistic and literary traditions but also at his own «oeuvre» as an auteur.

By looking at Woody Allen's past works, it can be seen that he has widely used parody and metafiction in his films, which results in comedies full of freshness and new insights. Woody Allen also used these devices in the theatre. Allen's early contributions in *Getting Even* (1975), constituted a series of parodies of other writers and genres: Hemingway, detective stories, political memoirs, academic course descriptions... In the next collection, *Without Feathers* (1978), the humour is increasingly surreal and metafictional, since his interest in language and its construction increases. He finds humour in the written form of language. One of his characters is called Lorborg and he was originally called «Lörborg, until, in later years, he removed the two dots from above the o and placed them over his eyebrows» (MCCANN, 1991: 57). The third collection, *Side Effects* (1981), is more subtle in style but is also full of parody.

God (1978) is an especially interesting work because of its use of metafictional devices and its similarity in subject with the film to be discussed in this paper: *Mighty Aphrodite*. *God* is a play within a play where the relation between fiction and real life is explored and questioned, but the tone is never tragic. Ontological questions are posed and rejected in a playful way to create fresh comic effects. It seems that there is no single reality because life is a layering of roles within roles with no fixed reality to use as a touchstone. The characters Hepatitis and Trichinosis, think about how to improve the play. They stage it and when Zeus is due to appear, he is strangled by the wires of his machine, parodying here the deus-ex-machina convention. Diabetes and Trichinosis have to think of an ending again. Frames are often broken, in a game where the audience enters the play and the characters phone the author, Woody Allen, for instructions. The control over the play changes constantly but of course in the end, the play is in the possession of the real author: Woody Allen (MCCANN, 1991: 63). There are many things that coincide with *Mighty Aphrodite*: a mixture of characters from different periods (Trichinosis and the characters of the play in comparison with the real Woody Allen and the real audience), anachronisms in

language and references to things beyond the fictional frame (like Allen being telephoned by a character).

Maybe because of these resemblances, critics such as Nick James have considered *Mighty Aphrodite* as a step backwards (1996: 49). However, looking back from time to time should not be regarded as something negative at all. Woody Allen may be using subjects and techniques already known to the audience but the result is still hilarious and refreshing. In this sense, as it has already been explained, this «looking backwards» is a technique typical of many artistic manifestations of the 20th century and the arena where parody and metafiction work.

Mighty Aphrodite does not only bear resemblances with Woody Allen's early plays. Among his work, there are many films where metafictional devices play an important role. This is the case of *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1984), where Celia, a waitress, escapes from her boring life with her selfish husband by repeatedly watching the same movie. She is in love with a character, Tom Baxter, and one day the character looks at her and says: «My God, you must really love this picture». He leaves the screen and Celia and Tom go together. There comes a point when Celia has to choose between the fictional character and the «real» actor. She chooses the actor, but the actor loses his interest in her and returns to Hollywood.

Although the film deals again with the problem of illusion and reality, dreams and rationality, these reflections are always set in a comic background. In the real world, that is to say, in Allen's fictional movie world, the spectator sees a completely disoriented Tom Baxter because reality has a different set of conventions than those of fiction. When he kisses Celia he waits for the fade-out, in the car he expects the engine to start by itself... These examples make us aware of the conventions used in the cinema that have been automated and are not questioned any more. But this does not seem to be something that worries the audience, as spectators do not feel trapped by conventions but released and free to laugh at them. When Tom is beaten up by Celia he is not hurt because he is the hero, he does not belong to her ontology. People always have to choose reality, but reality is not so bad after all because the hope that films bring is always there. Reality and fiction are also a realm of confusion in *Mighty Aphrodite*, which uses this kind of metafiction.

Annie Hall (1977) is a film where comedy and direct feeling go together. Alvy broke up with Annie and the movie is a reflection of his search for lost love. The beginning of the movie is already metafictional with the onscreen character talking directly to the spectators. At the beginning, one does not know if this is Woody Allen, the director, introducing the film or if he is a character. On another occasion, the adult narrator intrudes in his own childhood

memory as an adult. It is also remarkable how in the queue scene the characters talk directly to the camera. In this way, the narrative conventions of the classical film narrative are exposed and reworked to create comic effects. Critics such as Deleyto already suggest that the film can also be read as a reflection of Allen's life, who had recently had an affair with Diane Keaton (DELEYTO, 1994: 48). This would be a metafictional device in the sense that aspects of life are fictionalised in the world of the film. This sort of metafiction is also present in *Mighty Aphrodite*, if the film is read as a reflection of his problems with Mia Farrow and their adopted children.

After this introduction to the terms parody and metafiction, and this reflection upon the use Woody Allen has made of them in some of his plays and films, this paper will concentrate on *Mighty Aphrodite*. Both metafiction and parody are used in this cinematic text. The parody of the conventions of the Greek tragedy and comedy go together with metafictional jumps in time and space between the world of the Greek theatre and the world of 20th-century New York. In a sense, the aim of the parodist and metafictionalist is the same. In Waugh's view:

The parodist/metafictionalist, using an established mode of fiction, lays bare the conventions that individual works of the mode share (which therefore define it) and fuses them with each other to extrapolate an 'essence'. This is then displaced through exaggeration and the substitution of a new context, so that the relationship of form to content, as in the joke, is itself laid bare (1984: 78).

This is the way in which the film works. Two worlds fuse and create a new alternative world full of comic situations, although the «play» is supposed to be a tragedy.

Allen plays Lenny, a New York sportswriter, who along with his persuasive wife, Amanda, adopts a baby. This child, Max, turns out to be a prodigy so Lenny decides that he has to find the child's mother. After tracking her down, Lenny discovers that Linda is a prostitute and a porn actress. Lenny arranges to see her and finds out that Linda's family are not prodigies either. At the same time, Amanda is emotionally confused about the increasingly sexual interest that her boss has in her. Lenny talks to Linda's pimp and wins her freedom in return for some good seats to see the Knicks play an important game. He also arranges a match between Linda and a young boxer, Kevin. Amanda leaves the house and Kevin hits Linda, which makes Linda and Lenny find comfort in each other's arms for one single night. Afterwards, Linda will find a man that will love her for what she is. They marry and raise a baby girl that

Linda conceived of Lenny. Years later, Lenny and Linda come across with their kids and briefly say hello.

This may seem the summary of the film but it is not simply that. This is only an aspect of the film, an «alternative world» (WAUGH, 1984: 100). There is another world in the film and that is the world of the Greek theatre. The plot of the film is actually the plot of a Greek tragedy, or rather, a parody of a Greek tragedy. In this way the conventions of the theatre and the convention of the cinematic narrative fuse to create a new text. Parody is achieved through metafiction by means of a constant frame-breaking between the chorus of the Greek context and Lenny's story. The Greek chorus will become the onscreen narrator, the same as would happen in a Greek comedy. The *mise-en-scène*³ («staging in action») becomes the other device used for the narration. Curiously enough, this term was first applied to the practice of directing plays and includes aspects that overlap with the art of the theatre: setting, lighting, costume and acting. Of course, the film also uses cinematic ways of telling: editing, sound and framing, but their use is also directed to the flaunting of the theatrical conventions and the frame-breaking devices used throughout the narrative. All this will be applied to concrete examples of the film in this analysis of *Mighty Aphrodite*. It seems clear that the film is supposed to be read with the conventions of a Greek play in mind. The question arises when one has to decide whether this is a Greek tragedy or a Greek comedy. At first sight it may seem a comedy but a further analysis seems to hint that the film has also many of the characteristics of a Greek tragedy, of course, adopted to the 20th century in a progressive way.

The main belief behind the tragedies is that the world is controlled by moral law (*themis*) and that men who break that law will be punished by divine justice (*diké*) and fate (*nemesis*). Our hero, Lenny, seems to be always facing different moral conflicts. He hesitates between his right to know the mother of his adopted son and the right of the mother to hide his name. When he has to make a decision offscreen thunder is heard, and the chorus appears. The chorus advises Lenny not to go on. It says that curiosity is what kills men. This is precisely the role of the chorus in the Greek tragedies: it had to advise, defend and sometimes, as here, go against the hero's decisions. At this moment, Lenny resembles the position of Oedipus when, against the advice of his mother and the chorus, decided to go on in his search for the man that had brought so much sadness to the city. It was his curiosity that led him towards his tragic ending. This is the mood of the play when Lenny decides to go on with his own search. He decides to go against the chorus, ignoring its advice.

³ For further information on basic film terminology see (BORDWELL, 1986).

Another moment of moral conflict takes place when Lenny is in the adoption office looking for Linda's address. The coryphaeus appears here in a baffling metafictional jump and reminds Lenny that he is going against the law. Lenny has to decide between the law that forbids him to steal Linda's address and his own right to know. He chooses his right to know and even answers back to the coryphaeus that he will never be out of the chorus because he does nothing, while Lenny can have an active role. It is a way of stating that both are only playing roles, although different ones.

There is a third moral conflict at stake. It happens when Lenny decides that he will try to win Linda's freedom and will arrange a match between her and a young boxer Kevin, about to return to his life in Wampsville as an onion farmer. The Chorus thinks that he is challenging the gods in his attempt to go against fate and decide Linda and Kevin's destiny. However, he perseveres and continues with his plans.

The conflict in tragedy is not between good and bad, as may happen in melodrama. The conflict is between two opposite rights. The chorus and the hero (Lenny) seem to always have different perspectives about which right should be followed. Lenny seems to be always alone in his decisions. Of course, a Greek chorus cannot be expected to have the same set of values as a 20th-century New Yorker. This is best seen in relation with fate: the chorus thinks that trying to change the fate of Linda Ash is trying to be God, while Lenny thinks that there is nothing wrong in trying to help Linda out of prostitution. The parodic effect of this use of the moral conflict, lies in the fact that although the conventions belong to the Greek tragedy, the solutions are those of a present-day film. As Markiewicz points out: «Often the works of the past become aesthetic models whose recasting in a modern work is frequently aimed at a satirical ridicule of contemporary customs or practices» (MARKIEWICZ quoted in HUTCHEON, 1991: 11). The moral conflict is also reworked and adapted to the new situations. The chorus adapts itself to the new customs in a progressive way. This adaptation is clearly seen when the coryphaeus advises Lenny not to go to Linda Ash's house, reminding him of the danger of Aids, or when at the beginning, the chorus talks about ridiculous names of American cities. The conventions might be the same but the problems and situations have changed, which is parodied and produces humour. One cannot help laughing when one sees that the chorus is also a victim of modern technology. The whole chorus is on their knees invoking and begging for the help of Zeus, but Zeus is not «at home», the answering machine answers instead.

The tragic hero is also reworked. The hero in the Greek tragedy should be above the level of ordinary men. Lenny could be considered «above the level of ordinary men» if it is taken into account that he is part of New York's cultural

elite. This is something also recurrent in other films directed by Woody Allen (BENDAZZI, 1987: 29). Lenny's superiority is especially seen in the scenes where he and Linda talk together since Linda is a squeaky-voiced, unintelligent prostitute. However, as Aristotle explains in his *Poetics*, the hero cannot be completely good and perfect because we shall feel shocked and depressed by the thought that there is no justice in the world, and no just God to control it (1971: 55). The hero should have some fault or commit some sort of mistake. The simple sight of Lenny already indicates that this hero cannot be perfect: he is short, not too handsome and wears old-fashioned black-rimmed glasses. He is also rather clumsy and does not have a strong personality. Amanda, his wife, a successful art dealer, is the one that wears the trousers at home. This is seen when Amanda phones Lenny to tell him that she has talked with the adoption agency and they can adopt a baby. Lenny refuses categorically but after a cut and a temporal ellipsis, in the next scene, Lenny is holding a little baby, rocking him and thinking which name could be the best one for the baby. This speaks volumes about his authority within the couple.

This weakness or flaw in an otherwise good character, is called *hubris*. Sometimes, he even looks like an anti-hero. He is the typical character played by Woody Allen in many of his films. He resembles Isaac in *Manhattan* (1979) or Alvy in *Annie Hall* (1977). About this kind of weak character Woody Allen says that what interests him «is not the hero. It's the coward. It's not the success, but the failure. I think there are so many more of them in life. That's what I try and reflect in my movies» (in MCCANN, 1991: 79).

However, is this a tragic hero? He certainly follows the characteristics of a tragic one but it is undeniable that there is a comic trend derived from him. The same as with the chorus that looks like a tragic chorus of a Greek tragedy, this hero looks like a tragic hero but both are under the influence of metafictional jumps. The result is an absurd situation derived from the characters being out of context. It is not that the characters are comic in themselves but that their being in «defamiliarised» contexts produces the comedy.

The parody of conventions is applied in two directions: the conventions of the Greek tragedy are used in the cinematic text and those of the film are used by the Greek characters of the chorus. In this sense, the voice-over narrator provides an example of analepsis, talking about things of the past, as happens in his comment of Linda and Lenny's night together. He also offers a proleptic narration (GENETTE, 1987: 40), in his account of what happened to all the characters. The narrator is omniscient: he knows more than the characters. This is clearly seen when he comments on the accidental meeting of Lenny and Linda at the toy store. In the Greek comedies there usually was a comic discovery or *anagnorisis* at the end. Here the *anagnorisis* never comes for the character because

Lenny never learns that Linda's boy is his son. The revelation is only for us. So, this *anagnorisis* does not turn the character's «tragedy» into a «comedy». The comic element lies in a superior frame, since it is provided by the extradiegetic comments of the narratorial voice.

The coryphaeus will become a voice-over narrator at the end. He tells us how Linda drives to Kevin's farm in order to beg him to take her back and on the way back to New York, she stops her car for a helicopter pilot in distress. The appearance of the pilot is a parody of the theatrical convention of the *deus-ex-machina*. Parody is created once again through repetition with a difference. The difference is that the *deus* is a pilot who appears from the sky flying a helicopter and who will be Linda's saviour and the person responsible for Linda's happy ending. The device of the *deus-ex-machina* was also parodied by Woody Allen in *God* (1978) where God was strangled. Our hero is such a failure that he is not able to bring about a happy ending, since things happen in spite of him. A «God» is needed in order to save the situation. This is again a device used in the Greek tragedies applied to the 20th century.

Other conventions of the Greek tragedy can also be seen at the very end. In Greek theatre, after the tragic trilogy, a «satyr play» was sometimes acted. It was something funny and it was intended to relax the public, a little tired after watching the tragic trilogy for some hours. This is the function of the final choreography. The song *When You are Smiling (The Whole World Smiles with You)* cannot be more optimistic and relaxing. In fact our smile seems to have passed on to the whole range of characters of the play. One can see the happy image of Lenny's family, now delighted with Amanda and Max, or Linda's family, now married to a helicopter pilot. It is hinted that Lenny's sexual life is satisfactory and that Linda is happily working as a hairdresser. Kevin has successfully married and lives now in Wampsville as an onion farmer. He even says goodbye with his hand looking straight to the camera, straight to us. This ending is similar to that of *The Quiet Man* (1952), where the characters also appear happily saying goodbye to the camera. What it is really surprising is that the closed ending is so closed that the pimp, Ricky, and his friend, are seen watching the Knicks playing basketball. But not only the characters of the present-day plot are happy, but also the members of the chorus. Cassandra, Tiresias, Oedipus, Jocasta, Laius and the messenger are laughing, making jokes, kissing each-other, while watching the chorus dance.

This closed ending becomes a parody of the convention of Classical Hollywood, where the ending should not let any thread of action open. The parody works in the film through exaggeration because even the secondary characters find a happy closed ending at the end. It could also be read as metafictional if the lyrics of the song are taken into account. They seem to be directed

to the audience, as they encourage the viewers to smile and to make them see that their smile has made «the whole world smile». It is our power to smile that has changed the Greek tragedy into a comedy. The viewer has power over the film, which implies a breaking of frames, a blurring of narratological boundaries. The viewer becomes active and feels the power of his own ontological position. In this sense, the metafictional device does not imply any sort of pessimism but the other way round: our smile is contagious and is passed on to all the characters, those of the present-day plot and those of the Greek theatre.

The present-day plot may resemble, in its structure, a Greek tragedy. It has already been explained that there are characters above the level of ordinary men but with some flaw, characters that have to decide between two rights, problems about kinship... In fact, there are also melodramatic moments, such as when Linda tells Lenny that she had a baby and she had to give him away. Everyday she thinks of the baby and cannot help crying. The plot in itself is not comic since the characters are victims of their fate (nemesis). The comedy rather comes from the parodic scenes, such as the *deus-ex-machina*'s, the wild anachronies in language, the metafictional jumps... What makes the film a comedy is its use of parody and metafiction rather than the plot itself. It can even be said that it is the audience that makes the film a comedy. The audience are not only the «receptors» of the film, but also the «creators», they are powerful enough to change the ending only by their smiling. From viewers they become authors, also undergoing a metafictional jump.

Metafiction, the same as parody, is widely used in the film. First of all, it is used in the diegetic world, that inside the film, where there are constant metafictional jumps. In the first *agon* (confrontation of a character and the chorus), Lenny appears in the context of the chorus and defends his right to find out who the mother of his son is. Lenny is also with the chorus when he defends his right to arrange a match between Linda and Kevin and tries to take her out of prostitution. After Linda and Lenny make love, the coryphaeus asks Lenny whether the sex was good, something difficult to imagine in a serious Greek tragedy. But Lenny is not the only character «capable» of appearing in the world of the chorus, Amanda can also do it. As a matter of fact, Amanda and Lenny reconcile in the Greek amphitheatre with all the chorus looking on. They even change their masks for happy ones when the reconciliation is produced. It is the absurdity of these situations that makes us laugh. As Neale and Krutnick point out, «when conventions change, helping thereby to establish new regimes and standards of plausibility, films using outmoded conventions can appear, precisely, absurd» (NEALE and KRUTNIK, 1994: 70).

The Greek chorus belongs to the conventions of the Greek theatre. The appearance of these conventions in the background of the 20th-century story is

what produces the comedy. For Olsen «the basis of the ridiculous and the ludicrous... is the unlike» (1968: 15). To create a comic situation a departure from the norm is needed and this departure is clear in these abrupt metafictional jumps in time and space.

These jumps work in a double direction. Not only do characters of the 20th-century story appear in the world of the theatre, but also mythical characters such as Tiresias or Cassandra, the coryphaeus or the whole chorus turn up in the present-day context. The coryphaeus is the first to appear: he sits down in the adoption office and mysteriously disappears when the secretary returns. He is also present when Lenny phones Linda to get an appointment. In the Greek tragedy the chorus is supposed to help the hero; in this sense, it is quite parodic to see the coryphaeus «helping» Lenny by holding a piece of paper in order to let Lenny write down Linda's address. It seems that this coryphaeus is not in the mood to help Lenny too much and when Lenny has to confront Linda's pimp he will not do anything to help Lenny out of the difficult situation.

Tiresias plays the same role he would play in a Greek tragedy. He is the one that witnesses and tells. He appears in the 20th-century plot disguised as a blind man, subtle irony, and by the Akropolis, a Greek restaurant. Tiresias will be the one telling Lenny that his wife is having an affair with her boss, Jerry Bender. This Tiresias plays a similar role to the Tiresias in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), where he also witnesses the affair of a couple. The dialogue between Tiresias and Lenny is full of irony and puns. Tiresias reproaches Lenny for not having «seen» what was happening. Lenny must have been blind not to see it, since Tiresias is blind and has been able to see it.

Cassandra also appears on different occasions, always presaging bad auguries but she is never believed. This is her story according to the myth, she has the power to see the future but she has the disadvantage of not being believed. Taking Linda Hutcheon's idea that parody is repetition with a difference (1991: 32), the result is that the same myth of Cassandra is repeated but in the different context of the 20th century.

The whole chorus is also able to make a metafictional jump to the present-day New York. These jumps have followed a progression: first the coryphaeus, afterwards mythical figures like Cassandra and Tiresias and now the whole chorus appears out of context. This happens when Linda and Kevin meet for the first time and go for a walk. The spectator suddenly discovers that the whole Greek chorus is in the background. The camera stops following the couple and focuses on the chorus that starts singing and dancing with a choreography that has much more to do with a musical than with the ritual movements that the Greek chorus was supposed to do. The song *You Do Something to Me*, does not resemble the dithyrambic Dionysiac hymn that the chorus used to sing. In spite

of these differences, this chorus would still be a *como*, that is to say, a chorus that moves to a different place to make a cultural action, with parade and dance.

At the end, the function of the chorus, especially the coryphaeus, becomes of great importance. In a third-person voice-over narration the coryphaeus will explain what happened since the reconciliation of Amanda and Lenny onwards. A third-person voice-over narrator had already been used in *Take the Money and Run* (1969) and in *Zelig* (1983) among others. In this sense, devices of theatre, such as the use of the Coryphaeus as narrator are applied to the cinematic text, together with cinema devices, such as the voice-over narrator, also used by characters belonging to the conventions of the Greek theatre.

As I mentioned earlier in this paper, there is another type of metafiction that can also be appreciated in the film. Some aspects of the life of Woody Allen are reflected in *Mighty Aphrodite*. This type of reading, where traces of the author's life can be seen in his work, was fashionable in Romanticism and during the boom of Psychoanalysis. So far, this analysis of *Mighty Aphrodite* has concentrated on the cinematic text in itself but it is also important to remember that metafiction is also created by having the author's life «enter» the diegetic world. This is not something new for Woody Allen, whose life seems to be well-known and has influenced the plot of some of his works. Woody Allen started his career as a stand-up comedian and in *Broadway Danny Rose* (1984), he draws on his memories of his night-club years. Being a Jew together with his concern for Jews has also become a cliché in his films. Most of Allen's important male characters have been New York Jews. In particular in *Annie Hall* (1977), the male protagonist, Alvy Singer, keeps making series of extended Jewish jokes. In fact, he is a New York comedian. In *Manhattan*, the protagonist's Jewishness can be seen when at a party he responds to a discussion of a satirical article on anti-Semitism by advising everyone to put down their pens and pick up their baseball bats. This concern with Jews is also seen in *Mighty Aphrodite*, when in the gymnasium he mentions Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* (1993). Great popular jazz on the soundtrack is something present in nearly all his films and *Mighty Aphrodite* is no exception. The background sound when Amanda and Lenny reconcile in the amphitheatre is jazz music. *Mighty Aphrodite* displays many «Allenist devices» such as the amount of jazz on the soundtrack or Allen's presence as a character. By always using the same actors and music the conventions are laid bare with the aim of producing comic situations. All these motifs, together with the fact that Woody Allen plays nearly the same role in all his movies, become metafiction because their repetition lays bare their artificiality and construction. The effect is comic as long as the joke is recognised, as long as the spectator is «competent» and knows Allen's work.

In *Mighty Aphrodite* aspects of Woody Allen's private life are abundantly reflected. Everybody knows about Allen's marriage with Mia Farrow. They had adopted many children coming from different places and different races. The motif of adoption is seen throughout the film and is the prop of the action. In 1992, Woody Allen left his house and started a relationship with one of Mia Farrow's adopted daughters, Soon-Yi. Mia Farrow published a book in which she accused Allen of having sexually abused her adopted children. The book caused much controversy in the United States.

In the film, Woody Allen seems to defend his innocence as he plays a caring father for his adopted child. It is the way Max is brought up, and not genetics, that has made him a prodigy. This use of Allen's life in his films is important because the relationship between the characters and the author has become one of the typical marks of his films⁴. Curiously enough, this subject of adoption and of blood ties was an important concern and subject of the Greek tragedy. Kinship and its problems is the subject of many plots such as Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*. The subject gives Lenny a mythical touch, in fact, as the chorus says, his story is so Greek and eternal as destiny itself.

Both parody and metafiction have been used to create a comic effect, working as catharsis in the sense that it helps to release our emotions and brings forth a feeling of happiness. Parody has here a double use. There is a parody of the conventions of the Greek tragedy, which are reworked and joined to those of the comedy, creating a tragedy framed by a comedy (the chorus works as a comic narrator). Allen shows the artificiality of distinguishing tragedy and comedy, since life is a mixture of the two. At the end there is also a parody of the Hollywood conventions. A comedy should have a closed and a happy ending, usually a marriage. Parody works here through exaggeration because the spectator learns the ending of all the characters and there are even three marriages to match the three couples. The aim of parody is to bring about comic situations. It produces senseless situations, whose absurdity brings about laughter. This is the case with the last image of the pimp and his friend watching the Knicks play basketball.

Metafiction is also used in two fields. Both in the diegetic world and in the extradiegetic. Inside the story there are jumps between the two alternative worlds: that of the 20th-century plot and that of the Greek tragedy. The jumps have a two-way direction and are continual throughout the film. The other kind of metafiction is outside the diegetic world. The «competent» spectator sees

⁴ Deleyto already points out this trend when talking about the evolution of Allen's style: «narrative has now, to a certain extent, turned into personal experience, thus completing a cycle» (1994: 53).

how aspects of the private life of the director, Woody Allen, are reflected in the story and also how motifs of his films reappear in this one: the subject of the Jews, the jazz music, his own persona... Even the spectator undergoes a meta-fictional jump when discovering that his/her smile is able to make the whole world smile, as the song says. The plot, which was a tragedy, becomes a comedy thanks to the power of the audience to smile. We, as cinema «readers», become «authors» capable of changing the course of events and the fate of the characters.

Parody and metafiction are not always used in order to undermine conventions and represent fragmentation. Woody Allen has proved to master both techniques to the extent that they have become characteristic of his style. In this sense, *Mighty Aphrodite* is a very representative film in Allen's work, where parody and metafiction are combined to achieve hilarious effects. It is one of his most accomplished films, where we see many of Allen's comic strategies and techniques at work. Although only the «competent» and faithful spectator, who knows his films and life, can grasp the whole potentiality of the film's humour, *Mighty Aphrodite* is still an invitation to laugh. The viewers take the invitation because they know that when they smile the whole world smiles with them. What else can we ask for?

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