

Manhattan (1979)

Right with the opening monologue of Woody Allen's romantic comedy Manhattan which presents a montage of beautiful images of New York City, the audience knows that they are in the hands of a writer who is writing a book on his love for the city. And yet the audience realizes that he is struggling on what to exactly say, as he back peddles through narration, and re corrects what he is trying to suggest. Every film we are studying within this class has an artist behind the camera that is giving us a different interpretation of what the city within the film represents. The characters within the city of Manhattan for instance inhabit a city of phony intellectualism and snobbiness, which is in fact, a disguise behind arrogance and narcissism.

Woody Allen plays a failed television writer who seems to be going through a form of mid-life crisis as he gets involved in a relationship with an innocent high school student. He surrounds himself with character's that are involved in a wreckage of unhealthy relationships, and yet these people try to portray an illusion of intellectual high-class culture. His friend Isaac is in an unhappy marriage as he secretly has an affair with a New York intellectual named Mary. They all take trips to art museums and upper class social events in which they have intellectual discussions and debates on poetry, art, and literature, and debate the existential meanings on relationships and love; when ironically they themselves can't even seem to figure out how to straighten out their own personal lives.

While watching this film, I was thinking of the films of Italian director [Michelangelo Antonioni](#), and the character's that he portrays within his stories. Like Woody Allen, Antonioni's characters are wealthy, soulless, unhappy people who use the word love as more like an attempt to pass the time, and I believe the characters in Manhattan don't know how to love because they don't even love themselves. They seem to be trying to escape the boredom of their dull lives by reaching out to partner to partner, trying to find a meaning through life by using sex as a form of consolation.

Similar to the New York world of television's Seinfeld that Larry David created in the early 90's, the characters in Woody Allen's films inhabit a city that seems so shut off from the outside world of reality, which really involves different races and social classes. These characters are full of such narcissism and are so involved in this enclosed fantasy of egomania that no one else is of any important to them because of the delusional fantasy of the city that they themselves have created. Woody Allen's character's are always searching for personal self-discovery and usually end up at the end of the film, right in the same spot that they originally started out in.

The character of Mary introduces herself as the most confident and strong character within Isaac's group of friends. She is also one of the few who isn't originally from New York and states that multiple times within the film, which really makes little sense to the context of the conversation that they seem to be having. In one of the best scenes of the film, Isaac and Tracy run into Yale and Mary at the New York Art Museum. Mary seems to be blunt in her artistic opinions and seems to shoot down everything Isaac likes. And yet behind all her intellectual knowledge on painters, writers, and historians, you later realize she is the one who is having the most trouble struggling with her own self image and worth. Woody Allen's characters seem to be

unhappy and insecure upper-class New Yorkers who feel the need to indulge in intellectual conversations in order to mask the insecurities that they all are trying to repress.

Woody Allen's characters in his films are usually flawed individuals who never really know what they want, don't have any valid goals or ambitions and probably will continue living a purposeless existence. What I find interesting is that the characters within the story that are confident in what they want and don't seem to be struggling with their own self-image, would be the ones that mainstream society would have a harder time accepting. Tracy for instance is dating a much older man, and is looked at as naive and immature among her older comrades and Jill who decided to leave Isaac and live with another woman, is living a homosexual lifestyle. These characters seem to be the only character's throughout the storyline who aren't confused in who they are, what they want, and their own self image, and are the ones going against what is considered normal or acceptable within American culture.

Woody Allen's Manhattan is really about Woody Allen and his narcissistic thoughts, feelings, opinions, regrets and fears, and the city of New York City is the perfect foundation for him to express them. Isaac and Tracy seem to have very little in common but Isaac has such little self confidence in himself that he needs to have a partner who idolizes him; and Tracy is perfect for that. He at first urges her to leave the city and go to London, and when he finally succeeds and she decides to go he comes to the realization that he has made a fatal mistake. Isaac is a man with such insecurities and immaturity that he will selfishly go out of his way and plead for her not to leave on the day she is to depart, even though he knows deep down she is doing the right thing.

Woody Allen loves the city of Manhattan and the film is a beautiful hymn on being in love within that city. The opening scene is transcendent as it looks across Central Park, shows us rowboats in a lagoon, people taking carriage rides through the park, and at the same time you hear Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue playing within the background. For about two hours the audience gets taken along through a scenic view of the city with these highly complex and interesting characters as we watch them take tours through art movies, museums, restaurants and cafes. In the most iconic shot of the film Allen has us sit at a park bench under the towering New York bridge at dawn, as we realize that as complex love can be within the great city of Manhattan, it can be tremendous, even if it only lasts as long as the dawn of a new day.