

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING FAMOUS: ROMANCE AND SELF-IDENTITY IN WOODY ALLEN'S *CELEBRITY* (1998).

BEATRIZ ORIA GÓMEZ
Universidad de Zaragoza

citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk

brought

provided by idUS. Depósito de Investigación

of the "light" comedies directed by Allen during the nineties. All these films, like most Allen's films throughout his career, deal with human relationships, and more specifically with the problems attached to the creation and upkeep of heterosexual romantic relationships in the contemporary age. In spite of their "light" tone and trivial appearance, these films present an accurate reflection of the society in which they are inscribed; namely, an American, urban, educated, middle-upper class society; and sometimes have more to say about contemporary issues such as love, romance, commitment or marriage than many sociology books. In addition to Allen's general preoccupation with "the couple," these films also pay attention to issues such as the particular worries and afflictions of individual characters who are unfaithful, feel lonely, insecure, suffer from jealousy, long to find true love or have lost faith in it. Some of these characters suffer from a mid-life crisis which propels them toward a quest for self-discovery. Such is the case of Lee (Kenneth Branagh) in *Celebrity*. In this context, this essay will analyse Allen's use of generic conventions in *Celebrity* in connection with the wider cultural panorama in which the film is inscribed, trying to determine to what extent the depiction of issues traditionally associated to his filmography, such as the search for self-identity and the state of contemporary intimate relationships between the sexes has changed since these questions were first tackled by Allen in the seventies.

Celebrity tells the parallel stories of Lee and Robin Simon (Judy Davis), a couple which takes separate ways after he, suffering from middle-age crisis, decides to leave his partner in order to live the life he has been missing for sixteen years and find his real identity before it is "too late." From that moment on, the film shows us the different paths their lives take.

Lee, a mediocre journalist and wanna-be novelist, tries to get into the world of show business and sell a script for a film. During his pilgrimage through film sets, previews, art galleries, parties and casinos, he meets a number of characters which constitute a direct satire of that shallow world: an actress who is faithful to her husband only from the neck down (Melanie Griffith), a capricious and sexually

aggressive supermodel (Charlize Theron) and a spoilt film star (Leonardo DiCaprio). After a series of disastrous attempts to enter the world of celebrities and encouraged by his current girlfriend, Bonnie (Famke Janssen), who works as an editor, he decides to write a serious novel criticizing precisely the values of that world. The novel is never published because Bonnie throws it in the sea when Lee leaves her for Nola (Winona Ryder), a young woman he met at the beginning of the film. Showing his inconsistent nature, he abandons a solid relationship with Bonnie for a woman he has always idealized in his novels. As was to be expected, Lee and Nola's relationship is unsuccessful and the film ends in professional and personal failure for Lee.

On the other hand, Robin's trajectory is very different. Insecure and unassertive, she begins the film in a depressive and confused state. Her life changes when she meets Tony (Joe Mantegna), a successful TV-producer who courts her persistently. She starts to work for him and she is gradually introduced in the media world until she becomes a celebrity herself. Robin's relationship with Tony turns her into a more self-assured woman, allowing her even to drop her catholic inhibitions, which kept her sexually repressed. Robin's total success (she is now a married and pregnant career woman) contrasts strongly with Lee's failure in the last scene of the film, when they meet at the premiere of *The Liquidator*, the film that was being shot at the beginning of *Celebrity*. Even though the film centres on these two characters, it is Lee that takes more screen time and the one who can be considered the film's protagonist. This perception is reinforced by the type of character Branagh plays: the prototypical Woody Allen persona we are used to perceiving as the centre of the narrative in his films (he looks, speaks and acts like him). In any case it is Lee's personal circumstances that motivate the narrative: he realizes how unsatisfying his life is, and decides to do something to change it.

A way to start with the analysis of *Celebrity* would be to consider its generic profile. A straightforward categorization of a film into a single genre is always problematic, as most films tend to draw on conventions from different genres, never belonging to just one "pure" genre. *Celebrity* is not an exception. The first part of the film induces us to think that we are watching a comedy of remarriage.¹ The basic narrative of this genre involves a "couple who divorce but then remarry each other by the story's conclusion" (Musser 283). The beginning of *Celebrity*, which starts with the separation of its protagonists, could make us think that, after a series of different vicissitudes in their separate lives, they will finally get together in order to form a more perfect union. However, as the film progresses these hopes start to dissolve because, unlike traditional remarriage comedy, *Celebrity* does not send any signs of a possible final reunion. Robin and Lee are

¹ Term coined by Stanley Cavell in his book *Pursuits of Happiness*.

shown together just once after their separation (apart from the final scene): they meet at a preview and their encounter is not exactly friendly, as Robin starts to insult Lee hysterically in the middle of the film's projection. The lack of interaction between them throughout the film makes us dismiss real possibilities of reconciliation, so it could be said that this is a divorce comedy whose protagonists, unlike traditional examples of the genre, really do divorce.

Keeping this in mind, maybe it would be safer to refer to *Celebrity* by the broader term of romantic comedy, a genre which, as I shall show, is flexible enough to allow for variations in its structure. One of these "variations" is observed in the mixture of a more or less comic-romantic plot with sharp social satire, something that is not commonly found in this genre. Meant to "discourage vice and folly by means of ridicule," unlike the comedy of pure play, satire carries a meaning, a social or moral evaluation (Nelson 23). *Celebrity* makes use of all its visual and verbal devices to criticize the world of show business, within which the romantic plot is inscribed. It could be said that in this movie satire functions as a wider frame for romantic comedy, impregnating everything: the romantic vicissitudes of the characters take place among actresses of dubious sexual morality whose only appeal resides in their looks, supermodels who believe that the whole world is there to adore them, priests and plastic surgeons that are TV celebrities, talk shows which would do anything to raise their audience ratings, and spoilt film stars who are not arrested for their outrageous behaviour thanks to their popularity. In a word, *Celebrity* ridicules almost all the sectors of the show business: actors, directors, reviewers, producers, models, painters, scriptwriters... The satire is so far-reaching that it is even made extensive to Allen himself: at one point he criticizes pretentious directors who shoot in black and white and whose films are full of flashbacks, a healthy case of self-irony meant to recognize that the director himself is not completely above the world he is mocking.

In spite of this satiric "frame," romantic comedy can be considered as the "predominant" genre in *Celebrity*, a genre traditionally associated with the topic of self-identity. The relationship between both concepts was made explicit by Northrop Frye first, and later by Henderson, who links cultural representations of romantic love with a project of the self (19). This should be read in the light of Foucault's ideas about sex, which is seen by him as the site where most people long to find their true self. It also relates to Giddens's views of romantic love as the path towards the achievement of personal self-realization. According to him, romantic love, which is a cultural construct, is perceived nowadays as the means by which the individual is made whole, and also as a quest, an "Odyssey in which self-identity awaits its validation from the discovery of the other" (*The Transformation* 45). *Celebrity* can therefore be read as the obsessive search of a character for self-identity, an identity he expects to find in the romantic relationship with a partner of

the opposite sex. This “quest” for meaning is made explicit in the case of Lee and not openly stated in Robin’s story.

One of the most remarkable aspects of romantic comedy is its capability to reflect social changes and the state of contemporary intimate culture, helping define the changing relationship between the sexes through time. The seventies, for instance, witnessed the advances of the “sexual revolution,” a phenomenon which was conveniently depicted by romantic comedy, for example by the so-called “nervous romances” Allen made during the late seventies. This new type of romantic comedy had its roots in the radical changes that took place between the sixties and early eighties in the field of sexuality and intimate relationships. The sexual liberation brought about not only the conception of sex as a domain of pleasure, self-expression and self-realization, but also an uncoupling of sex from love which prompted the acceptance of non-monogamous and non-heterosexual lifestyles (Seidman 155). In this way, the weakening of the link between sex, love, commitment and marriage caused a deep crisis in the traditional heterosexual couple which, in accordance with the times, was faithfully represented by Allen in *Annie Hall* (1977) and subsequent films. Just as these films portrayed seventies preoccupations such as the breakdown of marriage, *Celebrity* also shows a notable engagement with its historical context: as I will argue later on, the film retains some elements of the “nervous romance,” putting forward that the impact of the sexual revolution is far from over in the late nineties. In fact, *Celebrity* suggests that some of its effects may have actually intensified, bringing about in some cases an even greater sense of instability within the couple than in the seventies.

Thanks to the historical perspective given by the decades gone by since the beginning of the sexual revolution, some sociologists have been able to evaluate its effects on succeeding generations. The disconnection of sex and marriage was made extensive to an uncoupling from any form of commitment, which proved to have a devastating effect in the successful formation and upkeep of solid relationships, a phenomenon which has seen a steady increase from the early seventies up to the present day. This disconnection has hampered the construction of meaningful relationships and has created a society in which “sex is available [...] but love is not” (Evans 142). Instead, we only have easy access to “free” love, a term coined in the sixties, which, today is “neither ‘free’ (in the sense of given without ties) nor ‘love’ (in the sense of the involvement of feelings and emotions other than those of immediate sexual desire)” (Evans 135). Freed from the constraints of the past, love is invested with a higher potential for self-realization and personal satisfaction. The result of this is higher hopes on what relationships can offer, which brings about greater disenchantment when they fail to materialize. This rise of expectations renders today’s search for love much more problematic than it was in the past. Although discourses of personal satisfaction and equality within the couple continue to exist ever since the sexual revolution, Evans sees a significant increase of

expectations “of complete personal fulfilment in the private sphere” as the only desirable pattern of relationships between human beings (127). This excess of hope brings about deeper disappointment than in the past when expectations are not met, because the emphasis on the private sphere as “haven” from the public world is more marked today than in previous decades.

The gap between the degree of satisfaction expected from a relationship and reality creates increasingly fragile relationships, a situation which is faithfully reflected in *Celebrity*: since Lee’s marriage does not meet the levels of self-realization and the emotional and sexual fulfilment promised by contemporary views of love, he leaves his wife with the hope to find his true self somewhere else, presumably in another kind of relationship, this time more in agreement with contemporary discourses on intimacy. According to Evans, the result of this rise of expectations and the subsequent impossibility to fulfil them is an increase in our appetite for love (130), which is precisely what Lee experiences, as he propels himself into a frantic search for his perfect match.

This quest for love, (which is actually a quest for self-identity) may be directly related to an unacknowledged dependence on women. According to Giddens, after the break with the mother the boy’s dependence upon women becomes masked, which is why his need for love is greater, since it is more deeply buried. In order to make up for this situation, at first he looks for reassurance in episodic sexuality and also in “the rule of the phallus,” that is, the assertion of social status and power (*The Transformation* 125,129). In *Celebrity*, Lee’s various sexual affairs and his search for recognition are a way to conceal his unconscious dependence on women. When he realizes that sexual activity alone can only fulfil him momentarily he finally decides to pursue the pure relationship as a means to attain self-identity. He believes to have found it with Nola, but he is wrong, because he confuses confluent love with romantic love and his quest for identity fails. This is so because, according to Giddens, the reflexive project of the self can only be realized within the pure relationship, which is not the same as romantic love. The pure relationship implies a “rolling contract” between the two members of the couple which keeps the relationship open to negotiation. It is also characterized by open communication and the free expression of individual needs, as well as by a democratisation of sex which sets no limits upon sexual activity. It also presupposes equality of resources between the members of the couple (Giddens, *The Transformation* 193-5). According to Giddens, the pure relationship is connected with the concept of “confluent love,” which constitutes the right path towards the achievement of self-identity. While romantic love depends upon “the projective identification of *amour passion*,” which “cuts across the development of a relationship whose continuation depends upon intimacy” (*The Transformation* 61), “confluent love” implies opening oneself to the other. In contrast with romantic love, which brackets off the *ars erotica* and presents an imbalance in gender terms,

“confluent love” presumes emotional equality within the couple and introduces the *ars erotica* into its core (*The Transformation* 62).

In the case of *Celebrity*, it is clear that Lee’s love for Nola is much more “romantic” than “confluent.” His total idealization of his (unknown) partner leads him to see in her the answer to his flawed identity. The reason for this is that romantic love “presumes a psychic communication, a meeting of souls which is reparative in character. The other, by being who he or she is, answers a lack [...] And this lack is directly to do with self-identity” (*The Transformation* 45). *Celebrity*, in fact, enacts this “meeting of souls” when Lee thinks he has identified his right partner in Nola when, in fact, what he sees is an idealized image of himself projected by romantic love. However, as has been mentioned before, this “projective identification” is not the best path towards the achievement of a coherent self-identity. For Giddens, this is found in the pure relationship, in which “the individual does not simply ‘recognize the other’ and in the responses of that other find his self-identity affirmed. Rather, [...] self-identity is negotiated through linked processes of self-exploration and the development of intimacy with the other” (*Modernity* 97). As was to be expected, Nola does not turn out to be Lee’s twin soul because the basis of the pure relationship is absent. In this way, when she refuses to settle in a serious relationship he is taken back to the starting point of his quest. Indeed, the film ends as it began for Lee: single and in the same unsatisfying social position as before.

In this way, the film tries to depict contemporary discourses of intimacy, showing the difficulties experienced by both sexes in the establishment and upkeep of fruitful relationships. As I have said before, one of the reasons for this difficulty lies in the fact that some of the conflicts aroused by the sexual revolution are far from resolved today. That is why *Celebrity* still retains some ingredients of Allen’s “nervous romance” in its representation of the “difficulties men and women face in initiating, establishing and sustaining attachments in an age that has seen the splitting of sex and self from previous guarantees of romantic and emotional fulfilment” (Krutnik, “Love” 18). This is specially true in the case of Lee: although he starts out advocating the principles of sexual liberation (he left his wife because he wanted to “explore” other possibilities), the film shows, in the line of other “nervous romances,” that this freedom has turned sour for him. Although we are no longer in the seventies, when female liberation shook the pillars of heterosexual relationships, third-wave feminism teaches Lee that the sexual revolution is not just a male prerogative, as he meets a series of powerful and sexually liberated women (Nicole, the supermodel, Nola...) who exercise total control over him. This reversal of roles, the proliferation of masculinized women such as those mentioned before and feminized men like Lee is directly related to contemporary discourses on gender equality, which entail the narrowing of the gap between the sexes (Potter 245). In this way, Lee comes to realize that one of the consequences of this new climate of equality is that women no longer want to commit to a serious relationship, which he

discovers when he is turned down by Nola. Therefore, Lee learns that “the breakdown of marriage is revealed to bring not plenitude but loss” (Krutnik, “The Faint Aroma” 69), a typical conclusion of the “nervous romance.”

In spite of *Celebrity*'s affinity with some elements of the “nervous romance,” its contemporary character is perceived in its awareness of romantic comedy's conventions. This knowledge on the part of the film leads to a self-conscious rejection of some of its classical conventions: to start with, the film disrupts romantic comedy's belief in the existence of the perfect match and the uniqueness of the relationship. There is no happy ending for Lee, no final union with the right partner. In fact, at the end of the film we cannot help but wonder if there was a right partner for him at all. Following the conventions of the comedy of remarriage Robin could have been Lee's right partner. However, there is no real interaction between them throughout the film, so their compatibility is never a real issue. On the other hand, Bonnie is presented as the most caring of all the women Lee is involved with, but he does not show enough passion with her, as he does with Nola. The latter seems to appear as Lee's right partner at first since their union follows all the conventions of romantic comedy: love at first sight, Lee's total idealization and adoration, the way in which they are portrayed by the camera when they are together... She also appears at the beginning and the end of the film, being the only “recurrent” woman in Lee's life. Nevertheless, her shallowness and disloyalty finally disqualifies her as a possible right partner.

Lee's relationship with Nola is the best example of this rejection of classical romantic comedy's conventions. As I said before, their relationship seems to meet at first all the prerequisites of the received romantic union. This is specially evident in the scene at the kiosk, when Lee declares his love to Nola. Being a black and white film this scene almost looks like a classical film moment, as several romantic conventions are self-consciously deployed by Allen in this highly idealized moment: after Nola and Lee's initial meeting, which meant love at first sight for Lee, this scene appears to constitute the final meeting of two twin souls, the sudden realization that they are made for each other, which is sealed with the close-up of a kiss. Their love is perfect because they do not really know each other and therefore their union is ideal. Lee sees in Nola only what he wants to see, projecting on to her his idealized romantic longings: “I know you, because I've written about you twice. Twice you were the obscure object of desire in books that I've written [...] I know you inside out.” To which she replies “Don't be misled. You didn't make me up,” something Lee cannot see.



Meeting at the kiosk:

The fulfilment of desire.

This is the point where most romantic comedies end, with the union of the lovers. In these films everything is perfect because the story is frozen at the highest peak of passion. We do not see what will happen tomorrow or in ten years time. In Nelson's words,

the moment the desire is fulfilled the curtain falls, and this momentary satisfaction goes on echoing in our minds... In the real world the play continues after the curtain has fallen, and when it is raised again there is not so much pleasure to be gained by seeing or hearing what is going on. (46)

This is precisely what happens in *Celebrity*. The film deviates from the conventions of romantic comedy in not allowing the curtain to fall after this scene so that we can see what happens after the "happy ending." Firstly, Bonnie's point of view is displayed. Usually, when a character leaves a partner for a more suitable one the "abandoned" partner's point of view is kept in the background in order not to disrupt the harmonious resolution. If the film dwelled too much on his/her grief the happy ending of comedy would be ruined. However, in *Celebrity* we have access to Bonnie's reaction to the news, a reaction which involves rage and, more

importantly, revenge, not a frequent element in romantic comedy indeed, something which farther problematizes the generic adscription of the film.

The happy ending is also subverted by Allen's desire to show us Lee and Nola's life together. Some months have gone by, and they are not a happy couple, as she (who warned Lee about her unfaithfulness) keeps on flirting with other men. Lee had denied this fact to himself thinking he could make her change, but now he cannot keep on deluding himself any longer. Romantic conventions are undermined again in the final scene between Lee and Nola at the theatre rehearsals when he asks her to marry him:

"So what do you want for dinner? What should I buy?"

"Spaghetti."

"I was going to ask you to marry me."

"No, penne... with marinara."

In this way Allen ruins the illusion of the "happily ever after" so important in romantic comedy. He denies the possibility of a happy union here but, ironically, he seems to assert the contrary in Robin's case. In order to do so he uses the same device he has undermined in Lee's story: to stop the narrative just at the moment in which desire is fulfilled, with Robin and Tony just married and expecting a child. So, in a way, it could be argued that Allen plays with the audience's expectations and knowledge of romantic comedy's conventions, both confirming and disrupting them.

However, Robin's case is completely different from Lee's. Her story is not framed by the conventions of the "nervous romance," but by another "type" of romantic comedy which stemmed from the eighties' social climate. The appearance of AIDS in this decade led to the stigmatization of casual sex, which provoked a revival of the conception of sex in connection with love, something intimately linked to courtship, romance and monogamy. In this way, the values attached to love as a source of individual pleasure were not erased; rather, its social and spiritual aspects were emphasized again (Seidman 194-196). These evolving social conditions were reflected by romantic comedy in what Neale called the "new romance," which being aware of the long tradition of romantic comedy behind it, tried to recuperate the values of "old-fashioned" romance (287), thus reinforcing dominant discourses of the time, which, under the influence of the New Right, proposed a return to traditional values regarding the family and the heterosexual couple.

In the case of *Celebrity*, this situation is reflected mainly in Robin's story with Tony. It could be argued that this "part" of the film makes use of some of the conventions that define traditional romantic comedy, and more specifically the "new romance." To start with, Robin meets Tony in quite an extraordinary situation, as the "meet-cute" convention outlined by Neale in the "new romance" canon demands

(she is at the plastic surgeon's clinic trying to decide whether to change her face while being inadvertently filmed by a camera for the TV program he produces). The function of the "wrong partner" is not performed by Lee. The obstacle in this case is internal: Robin's past and her "incorrect" attitude towards life (Neale 287-90) block the formation of the couple, complicating the narrative and adding some suspense to the final resolution. In addition, Robin's "nervousness" is used by the film as one more source of humour, taking advantage of her inadequacy in certain situations: her clumsiness in some social contexts (for example when Tony invites her to the preview where he meets Lee: drunk, she makes a scene at the cinema), as well as professional ones (she is nervous and incompetent coordinating the guests for the talk show), all of which is used for comic purposes. Needless to say, despite Robin and Tony's differences they manage to find the common ground required for marital union.

Speaking of this "common ground," it should be mentioned that *Celebrity* re-enacts the recurrent topic in romantic comedy of the reconciliation of opposite poles. Often the two people who are destined to become a couple are adversaries at first. In *Celebrity*, Robin and Tony are not enemies because they like each other from the start, but they do represent opposite qualities and values in the sense that they belong to completely different worlds. She is coy, inhibited and insecure. Besides, she teaches literature, which identifies her with the world of culture and high art. On the other hand, Tony is a self-assured, successful man who works as a producer in the field of media and popular culture. Gradually, their differences will be overcome when she changes her whole personality in order to fit into his life.

Robin's radical change is presented as a gradual process. The first image we get of her is associated with a nun, which already points to her repression. Her look is quite sloppy and her lack of assertiveness is already shown in her first scenes when, instead of complaining, she decides to eat the overdone meat she hates. Later, when she meets Tony at the plastic surgeon's she displays her lack of social abilities and clumsiness in flirting. Her nervousness reaches neurotic levels when she meets Lee at the preview. Once the relationship between Robin and Tony is established, she becomes aware of her sexual repression and, in accordance with contemporary discourses on sexuality as a source of self-identity and pleasure disconnected from reproduction,² she tries to solve her inhibitions with the help of a prostitute. The next scene showing Robin presents us a much more self-assured woman: she is now a TV presenter with a new look who reports gossip news of the jet set and her progress in her sexual learning is made evident by one of the interviewees's comment. Nevertheless, despite this change, her insecurities surface once more the day of her wedding with Tony, when she runs away thinking she does not deserve so much happiness. It is obvious that her self-esteem is still quite low, something which

² What Giddens calls "plastic sexuality" (1992: 2).

seems to have changed by the last scene, when, paralleling the beginning, she meets Lee at the cinema, but this time as a new woman: rich, famous, married, pregnant and happy.



Robin at the beginning of the film vs. the new Robin.

This scene, which would have seemed to include all the requisites of the happy ending in the past is problematic today because the two members of the couple have not invested the same personal effort in order to attain this “marital bliss”: it is Robin that undergoes the greatest transformation, while Tony does not change a bit. The narrative does not concede any kind of evolution on Tony’s part and makes no concessions to place him nearer Robin’s initial persona. What may be more annoying (especially for the feminist critic) is that it is the woman that must experience the greatest change in order to achieve the happy ending. Instead of being a mutual learning process, Robin and Tony’s relationship works almost on a teacher-pupil basis. In this way, she loses her inhibitions, improving her external appearance (the only thing that is really taken into account in the superficial world of spectacle) and becoming a socialite. There are other films in Allen’s filmography that present teacher-pupil relationships between men and women, such as *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan* (1979). However, in these films the pupils used to outgrow their teachers, and eventually desert them. These films ultimately showed women who underwent deep developments towards independence and self-knowledge, and

flawed men who needed a female partner more than they thought they did. Being “independent” in these films did not mean being single, rather, it meant being in a relationship “as an equal, not an inferior” (Shumway 167). This message, which has been constantly repeated throughout Allen’s filmography, is contradicted by Robin’s “happy ending,” which feels somewhat surprising in the context of the ideology of love and relationships usually reflected in his films.

Apart from *Celebrity*’s oddity in the context of Allen’s work, the wider social panorama in which it is inscribed also contributes to the disturbing effect of the film’s “happy ending.” Social change has modified contemporary audiences’ viewing strategies, who may find difficult to accept *Celebrity*’s ending as “happy.” These new social circumstances have also contributed to the evolution of the genre itself: thanks to contemporary discourses on equality between the sexes, the learning process that the characters of today’s romantic comedy typically undergo concerns the male character as much as the female (Luzón 169), and both must make the same effort in order to find the common ground necessary for the couple’s existence. In this new context, the teacher-pupil relationship presents itself as old-fashioned and clearly unbalanced in terms of power. The film is aware of it and deploys the conventions of the “new romance” self-consciously, knowing that they are outdated. Once the eighties’ wave of conservatism was overcome, the arrival of third-wave feminism made necessary more accurate ways of representation of heterosexual relationships. According to Gil, this took the form of a more egalitarian readjustment of the conventions (152). The greater equality between the sexes that was taking place in society needed to be reflected by the cinema, which now presented a more balanced romantic union, based on an equal exchange of knowledge and not necessarily subject to marriage. Thus, in contemporary romantic comedy, the characters’ individuality tends to be privileged over the couple’s integration in the patriarchal structure (Gil 154-5). In this new context of relative equality between the sexes, *Celebrity*’s happy ending feels clearly contrived, because Robin does not find her true identity in her union with a new partner; rather she adopts his identity, and her individual self is completely subordinated to Tony’s, which points to the fact that the film, aware of the “new romance’s”’ obsolescence, is actually exaggerating its most conservative aspects in order to ridicule this genre’s unsuitability for the reflection of contemporary relationships.

This mockery of the “new romance” as a genre, then, reveals Allen’s ideas about love and self-identity in an indirect way. Unlike his films of the seventies, in which these issues were openly tackled through the characters and the stories themselves, Allen has modified his approach to these questions in the nineties due to a series of industrial, social and personal circumstances: according to García Mainar, Allen keeps dealing with the same issues as in the seventies, but explicit reflection is now replaced by the generic tensions that take place within the text. This is motivated firstly by Allen’s loss of credibility in the field of relationships as a

consequence of the scandal created by his affair with his adopted daughter: according to García Mainar, this issue affected his image as “modern, urban thinker” (185-6). Secondly, this new tendency in Allen’s cinema was also brought about by the changes undergone by the film industry during the nineties, which now placed a greater emphasis on entertainment than open reflection. As a consequence of this, his personal discourse had to be “disguised” under lighter forms of entertainment: Allen’s “relationship story,” which had been so popular during the seventies, had to be mixed with other genres in order to conceal its reflections about love and self-identity (García Mainar 188-90).

The generic tension that García Mainar identifies in such Allen films of the nineties as *Manhattan Murder Mystery* (1993) is also present in *Celebrity*, functioning as a vehicle for the expression of Allen’s personal vision about these issues: the tension between the integrating tendency of romantic comedy and the bitter humour of satire ultimately reveals the director’s ideas about contemporary relationships and their role in the achievement of self-identity. This mixture of genres points to the ironic nature of the happy ending, since the protagonist finally embraces everything the film has been satirizing. This is so because the romantic union between Tony and Robin is intimately linked to their Pigmalion-Galatea relationship within the world of show-business, the target of Allen’s satire all through the film. Due to the impossibility to separate both concepts (the couple’s relationship and Robin’s introduction in this world), the satire is made extensive to the romance too, thus mocking traditional forms of romantic comedy, not because Allen would not like to believe in the idea of love they imply, but because they are no longer suitable for the representation of contemporary relationships.

The film seeks to portray the new situation of equality between the sexes as accurately as possible, and this is done openly in the case of Lee and in a more oblique way with Robin. In her case, the ridicule of the “new romance” responds to Allen’s wish to expose social changes: the emphasis on this genre’s inadequacy serves to highlight them. However, the fact that Allen wants to represent this new reality does not mean that he is willing to support it. Rather, he seems to do the contrary: even though the film does present contemporary intimacy discourses which include a greater equality between the sexes, the recognition of the importance of sex in the relationship and the irrelevance of marriage for the achievement of satisfactory coupling, *Celebrity* betrays a certain nostalgia for the past and traditional notions of romance. Robin’s genuine happiness with her new situation questions the validity of the new ideas about love and romantic relationships the film presents, and despite the critique of the world which Robin embraces with her marriage, she is unambiguously presented as a happier woman: according to the film’s scale of values, she has changed for the worse because she has taken on everything the film despises: popular culture instead of serious art, the vanity of the spotlight, physical beauty instead of inner beauty, etc, but she is much

happier now, having found a satisfactory identity in this new self. As Robin herself openly recognizes, “I’ve become the kind of woman I’ve always hated. But I’m happier,” thus encapsulating the film’s inner contradiction between what it rationally despises and what it sentimentally longs for. This means that Allen’s scorn of traditional forms of romance is aimed at the genre’s “outdated form,” rather than at its ideology:³ in its open presentation of Robin’s (that is, woman’s) happiness in her unbalanced relationship with Tony, Allen is showing a nostalgia for the conservative ideology embedded in traditional romantic comedy, with its belief in the durability of the couple and its implicit subordination of the woman in the patriarchal structure of marriage.

This nostalgia is also evident in Lee’s story: after having a taste of the nineties new climate of sexual liberation, he now longs for old-fashioned romance again and the security of marriage, as his proposal to Nola proves. The film’s ending for Lee seems to regret this new situation of equality between the sexes in which women no longer want to settle down with a single man for life, implicitly yearning for a more traditional type of woman. According to Babington and Evans, the typical Allen character (played here by Branagh) is usually attracted by both kinds of women (traditional and new independent woman). However, at the end the traditional woman is normally preferred because she is perceived as being less problematic (168). On the other hand, the “new woman” type is frequently caricatured by Allen, as is the case in *Annie Hall* or *Manhattan*. In *Celebrity*, the “new women” Lee meets are highly attractive, but their freedom and independence proves too threatening for Allen: Nicole’s and the supermodel’s unsettling (sexual) power over men, Nola’s lack of dependence on a man... even Bonnie’s intellectualism, which is characteristic of the “new woman,” is satirized when we learn that she has sold a script, something she has despised all through the film.

As Babington and Evans point out, whether these characters are “self-conscious caricatures of male fears about the New Woman” or a “reflection of his own real anxieties” is hard to know (169). In any case, most Allen’s films privilege tradition over the new values emerged in the “post-Vietnam, New York Jewish culture of heightened radicalism and feminism” (167). This tradition is usually embodied by women like Robin, whose uncomplicated sexuality and lack of pretentiousness do not pose a menace to the hero’s ego, offering him the key to happiness through marriage or a traditional heterosexual union. The partnership with this traditional woman constitutes a reassuring standpoint for the man, as she seems to exist “solely to celebrate the superiority of the male” (168). This is Robin’s case, whose inferiority with respect to Tony is presented by the film as an asset rather than an obstacle for the achievement of happiness.

³ Despite the impossibility of ascribing specific ideologies to genres, and the fact that “romance” for itself cannot be said to be conservative or progressive, its inevitable actualisation within a patriarchal structure has fostered an unconscious association between this genre and conservative positions.

As a conclusion, it can be said that romantic comedy proves an appropriate genre to explore the topic of self-identity in this film because cultural representations of love have frequently been linked to the project of personal self-realization. In the case of *Celebrity*, this connection is explicitly foregrounded by the narrative since both protagonists expect to find their true selves in the relationship with a member of the opposite sex. The dénouements of both stories seem to endorse the validity of contemporary discourses about love and selfhood which connect the successful achievement of self-identity not with romantic love but with the pure relationship.

Similarly, the generic analysis of *Celebrity* shows that romantic comedy constitutes the ideal vehicle for the exploration of contemporary ideas about sex, love, and the relationships between the sexes in general. Thus, *Celebrity*'s ending confirms Deleyto's argument that "contemporary uncertainties about the institution of marriage and durable heterosexual relationships seem to have affected the traditional convention of the happy ending in the genre" (142). Lee's misery at the end of the film and Robin's contrived "happy ending" reflects the historical context in which it is inscribed: the age of equality between the sexes, the pure relationship and the devaluation of marriage, which is seen by feminism as a restriction of women's freedom. In accordance with these historical coordinates, it is hard to see Robin's wedding as a happy ending, because it actually means her submission to patriarchy and the loss of her individual self.

In this way, *Celebrity* reflects its historical context accurately and shows an interest in contemporary discourses on intimate matters. However, "showing" these discourses does not mean "supporting" them. Although the film is rationally aware of the relevance of these ideas, sentimentally it seems to argue for the contrary, endorsing traditional notions of the couple. The impossibility of reprising the ideal situation of the old days leaves us with a rather bleak vision of love: the case of Lee tells us that, in the present context of gender equality, relationships are doomed to failure, which condemns most people to a sad state of loneliness and a permanent search for a mate. On the other hand, Robin's story shows that those relationships which succeed do so at the expense of a loss of individuality in one of the couple's members, something that did not happen in Allen's films of the seventies. The fact that this role is assumed by the woman points to Allen's increasing conservatism, as the film shows a belief in the need to maintain traditional structures of female subordination under patriarchy if the couple is to succeed. The final message is that satisfactory relationships between men and women are impossible in the present context, in which feminist advances and new intimacy discourses render unviable traditional models of heterosexual union and the unbalanced distribution of power they implied; which betrays Allen's nostalgia for a past in which traditional models of womanhood allowed for satisfactory heterosexual relationships and happy endings were not ironic.

WORKS CITED

- Babington, Bruce, and Peter W. Evans. *Affairs to Remember: The Hollywood Comedy of the Sexes*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1989.
- Cavell, Stanley. *Pursuits of Happiness*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984.
- Deleyto, Celestino. "Love and other Triangles: Alice and the Conventions of Romantic Comedy." Eds. Peter Evans and Celestino Deleyto. *Terms of Endearment: Hollywood Romantic Comedy in the 1980s and 1990s*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998. 129-147.
- Evans, Mary. *Love, An Unromantic Discussion*. Cambridge: Polity P, 2003.
- García Mainar, L. M. "El amor en la encrucijada: comedia romántica, identidad y autor en *Manhattan Murder Mystery*." *Archivos de la filmoteca*. 44, (June 2003): 172-191.
- Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
- . *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.
- Gil, Vicky. "La fierrecilla indomable: Julia Roberts y la comedia romántica de los 90." *Archivos de la filmoteca*. 44, (June 2003): 140-155.
- Henderson, Brian. "Romantic Comedy today: Semi-Tough of Impossible?." *Film Quarterly*. Vol. 31, 4. (Summer 1978): 11-23.
- Krutnik, Frank. "Love Lies: Romantic Fabrication In Contemporary Romantic Comedy." Eds. Peter Evans and Celestino Deleyto. *Terms of Endearment: Hollywood Romantic Comedy in the 1980s and 1990s*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh U.P, 1998. 15-36.
- . "The Faint Aroma of Performing Seals: The "Nervous" Romance and the Comedy of the Sexes." *The Velvet Light Trap*. No 26. (Fall 1990): 57-72.
- Luzón, Virginia. "¿Qué hace un chico como tú en un lugar como éste? Harrison Ford y la comedia romántica." *Archivos de la filmoteca*. 44, (June 2003): 156-171.
- Musser, Charles. "Divorce, DeMille and the Comedy of Remarriage." *Classical Hollywood Cinema*. Eds. Kristina B. Karnick and Henry Jenkins. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. 282-313.
- Neale, Steve. "The Big Romance or Something Wild?: Romantic Comedy Today." *Screen* 33. 3, (Autumn 1992): 284-299.
- Nelson, T.G.A. *Comedy: The Theory of Comedy in Literature, Drama and Cinema*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1990.
- Potter, Cherry. *I love you but... Romance, Comedy and the Movies*. London: Methuen, 2002.
- Seidman, Steve. *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830-1980*. New York and London: Routledge, 1991.
- Shumway, David R. *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy and the Marriage Crisis*. New York and London: New York UP, 2003.