

AMELIA PRECUP, *The Reality I Speak of Here...’ The Long Analysis of Woody Allen’s Short Fiction* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2023)

---

A lot has been said and written about Woody Allen as a film maker, but few people know that he is also a very gifted writer. Originally a doctoral thesis, Amelia Precup’s monograph on Woody Allen’s short fiction is a very interesting Romanian contribution to the study of this fascinating personality of American movie and literature.

The Romanian reception of Woody Allen’s work goes back to 1978. Eugen Marian translated one of Allen’s short stories for issue no. 3/1978 of the humorous magazine *The Nettle*. After 1990, as the unhindered access to Woody Allen’s films and fiction improved, some Romanian essayists dealt with his work. It is the case, for instance, of Magda Mihăilescu’s “Mic tratat de woodyallenologie” [“A Short Treatise on Woody Allen Studies”], published in *Adevărul literar și artistic* [*The Literary and Artistic Truth*] of 23 April 2002, page 5. Allen’s fiction has drawn the attention of Marian Boris in his essay “Philip Roth, un Woody Allen al prozei” [“Philip Roth, a Woody Allen of Fiction”], published in *Contemporanul – Ideea europeană* [*The Contemporary – The European Idea*], issue 9, March 2003, page 18, and of Iulia Blaga in “Proza bate filmul” [“Fiction Beats the Movie”], published in *Suplimentul de cultură* [*The Cultural Supplement*], issue 13-19, August 2005, page 14, where “Kugelmass”, Allen’s short story that also attracted Amelia Precup’s attention, is analysed. Still, all these are short pieces that do not have the grasp of the monograph authored by Amelia Precup, senior lecturer at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, and a competent American Studies specialist with great potential for cutting edge research.

Precup is a thorough explorer of Woody Allen Studies and her bibliography (Richard Shickel, Sander Lee, Sam B. Girgus, Eric Lax, Richard Blake, Spignesi, Douglas Brode, Graham McCann, Nancy Pogel, Judith Stora-Sandor, Foster Hirsch, Vittorio Hösle, and so on and so forth) hardly misses any investigation of this topic. Of special relevance are the interviews taken to Woody Allen by Robert E. Kapsis and Kathie Coblenz as it is always interesting to confront a creator’s perspective on himself/herself with his/her (specialized, professionalized) readers. The questions of Kapsis and Coblenz act as a kind of intellectual litmus testing the inner resources of Allen’s writing and its peculiarities.

A valuable study cannot be only a long (and, very possibly boring) acceptance of previous approaches, a good scholarly book must also have some polemical notes. Precup’s tract is no exception, in this respect. Amelia Precup has substantial and firmly grounded convictions about her topic and her argument with Britta Feyerband about the nature of Allen’s relationship with the past shows expertise, eloquence, and scholarly elegance. At the end of a doctoral research, it often happens that some kind of symbiosis grows between the researcher and the object of his research. Precup seems to have taken something from Woody Allen’s wit, the title of her monograph being built upon the joking contrast between the recognition that hers is a “long analysis” dealing with a writer’s “short fiction.”

As expected in a monograph dedicated to a single personality, Precup presents, with savvy and intellectual acumen, her hero's evolution, namely the cultural context of Alan Stewart Konigsberg's transformation into Woody Allen. Issued from this modern Babylon, which is New York, Woody Allen succeeds in fusing two types whose common denominator is humour – an apparently mild, but, in fact, corrosive humour. Charlie Chaplin's Little Man and the Jewish trickster, the *schlemiel*, meet and become one character whose rare wit is suave and delicate. His uniquely inquisitive badinage combines with erudition and anxiety whether we, the humans are able to be humans. God supervises from the distance Allen's fictional worlds. There is some kind of theological anxiety in the background of Allen's plots but the writer's plotting is for people who live in the sight of God. Allen's God does not terrify the people.

Precup's thesis tackles Allen, the short fiction author, from three points of view: his belonging to postmodernism, his Jewishness, and the influence of the famous periodical: *The New Yorker*.

In the chapter dedicated to Woody Allen and his allegiance to postmodernism, after the compulsory references to Lyotard, Baudrillard, Jameson or Hutcheon, Precup insists on Tony Hilfer's perspective on postmodernist humour: aggressive, nihilist, and a bit cynical. According to Precup, Woody Allen, the writer, displays a whole merry-go-round of postmodernist strategies, but he is also aware of the dangers of extreme postmodernism and never completely gives up the existence of a unique, coherent consciousness - an idea where the influence of Sartre is obvious.

Precup deals with Woody Allen's Jewishness by inscribing him into Jewish American literature as defined by the well-known scholars Hana With-Nesher and Michael Kramer. Undoubtedly, Woody Allen also belongs to the impressive tradition of Jewish humour and Precup has profound and nuanced knowledge of it. Of course, Allen's short fiction cannot function in the absence of some classical personages in Jewish (American) literature. The Jewish mother, the shiksa, the schlemiel, they all face and respond to assimilation, discrimination, self-hatred either because of their ethnic origin, or because they have connections with the Jews. Precup delights her reader with a very successful analysis of Count Dracula's transformation into a luckless schlemiel (pp. 182-183) and also insists on the romance of Jews and with Jews. Marriage, in Allen's opinion, gradually turns into amour in its most degraded state, and if we think of the gossip about him that came out of Hollywood, this assumption of his is no wonder. But if we leave the real Allen's matrimonies and romances and look for the re-presentation of love in Allen's fiction, we find Sartrean and Freudian echoes as well. Allen considers that the achievement of unity in love leads to dominance and possession, and not to fulfilment and happiness. The urban and slightly neurotic Jew, Allen's favourite incarnation both in fiction and cinema, cannot find contentment in affection. His eudemonia is in the mild anxiety of being, above all, ironical to himself. Metaphysics, humour, banter, self-mockery, they all combine in ways that only Woody Allen can develop.

The chapter dedicated to Woody Allen's connection with *The New Yorker* is of extreme importance and relevance in Precup's study. Between 1960-1980 Woody Allen was an important contributor to this literary magazine which deserves a prominent place in the literary history of the United States because of its high standards and very severe selection of materials. Allen published here over 25 short stories. The comparisons with Robert Charles Benchley (1989-1945)

and Sidney Joseph Perelman (1904-1979) insert Woody Allen in the tradition of American humour which he continued in an original way. Why this steadfast faithfulness to this journal? Precup considers that writing responds to Allen's isolationist and escapist needs and *The New Yorker* offered him the sophisticated, highly educated readership that he was satisfied with. In other words, writing completes Allen's cinematographic experience and fills in a gap in his personality.

Written with a sure hand by Amelia Precup, this monograph impresses readers - including very knowledgeable readers - by the author's elegant style, proper terminology, and scientific acribia. Precup concludes that Woody Allen is more than a genius of contemporary American cinema, he is also a unique personality where learnedness and laughter cohabit together elegantly and convincingly. To put it in a nutshell, Amelia Precup's book relies on solid arguments attacking the citadel of conclusions from several points, all the attacks being carried out and converging towards a final victory. Should Allen read it, he certainly would be pleased to find his writing deciphered in this way. Irony, scholarship, humour make Allen's existential anxiety a very special contemporary echo to questions and dilemmas which humans from all over the world struggle with.

MIHAELA MUDURE

mmudure@yahoo.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0930-9050>.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26424/philobib.2025.30.2.24>.