

Oscar's Unrecognized Adaptations: Woody Allen and the Myth of the Original Screenplay

In the field of adaptation studies, few scholars have it down so clearly as Oscar, the world's most prestigious film award; as far as Oscar is concerned, assessing adaptations presents no major problem, since they can be easily separated from non-adaptations, or: Original Screenplays, to use Oscar's terminology. It may best be left to the imagination of the reader whether the Academy Awards have managed to solve the question of originality, in spite of adaptation theory's continued insistence on the fact that "there is no such thing as an autonomous text or an original genius that can transcend history" (Hutcheon 111), or whether they have not really bothered to ask it in the first place. By focusing on one of the Original Screenplay award's most recent winners, writer-director Woody Allen (whose script for *Midnight in Paris* won him his third Academy Award in that category, following past wins for *Annie Hall* and *Hannah and Her Sisters*, respectively), this essay will discuss Oscar's clear-cut distinction between Original and Adapted Screenplays, which is not shared by a number of other award ceremonies.¹ I will argue that *Midnight in Paris* is not only an adaptation that went unnoticed by the Academy voters, but that it also delivers a highly satirical take on Hollywood's adaptation policy in general, which fails to conceptualize adaptations in a wider sense, that is, beyond a legal term to avoid copyright infringements. This interpretation shares an aim frequently articulated within adaptation studies at the moment, as scholars like Simone Murray have attempted to look beyond mere textual analysis and to foreground "those issues usually pushed to the margins of adaptation studies work: the industrial structures ... and legal and policy regimes within which adaptations come to be" (6). Therefore, I will draw attention to some major inconsistencies at the heart of the world's most prestigious award bestowed upon screenwriters. In the process, I will address the topic of adaptation with regard to Allen's *œuvre*, an aspect that tends to be overlooked in favor of *auteur* rhetoric.

The Screenplay Policy of the Academy Awards

Although the design of the Oscar statuette itself reflects the movie industry's indebtedness to screenwriters,² and although the screenplay category is included in the list of the "Big Five" categories (Best Picture, Director, Actor, Actress, Screenplay), which so far only three films have managed to win,³ the importance bestowed upon screenwriters within the annual award show seems to reflect their stereotypical image as the "lowliest on the Hollywood food chain" (Murray 150). They are not discussed in detail in any of the book-length studies dedicated to the history of the Academy Awards either (cf. Levy; Kinn and Piazza).

Nowhere is the dilemma more evident than in the televised Academy Award ceremony: While there are separate program slots to honor more prestigious but similarly related categories such as Best Actor and Actress, or Best Song and Original Score, the two awards for screenwriting are usually covered by the same presenter and are not granted a prestigious slot. Although the Academy of Motion

Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) acknowledges writers by showing photographs of them when the nominations are read out—an honor that is not bestowed upon nominees in minor categories such as Best Documentary—the common practice of having the presenter read out a short passage of secondary text before showing a dialogue exchange on screen is, at best, unintentionally funny. The practice is even oddly reminiscent of a joke Allen makes in his short story, “Spring Bulletin” (1967), when he talks about the history of theater:

[B]efore the invention of italics, stage directions were often mistaken for dialogue, and great actors frequently found themselves saying, “John rises, crosses left.” This naturally led to embarrassment and, on some occasions, dreadful notices. (Allen, *The Complete Prose* 203)

Hollywood’s ineptitude to grant its screenwriters an appropriate spot in the limelight during the Academy Awards appears somewhat baffling, for screenwriters have been included in the honors list since the ceremony’s inception in 1928. Following twelve years in which there were prizes for the Best Adapted Screenplay on the one hand and the Best Story on the other (a differentiation that reflected the division of labor in the major film studios), the Academy added the category Original Screenplay in 1940, eventually settling for the duality of Original Screenplay and Adapted Screenplay in 1957, today set down in item 3 of its awards definitions (“Rule One”). The exact wording, “Adapted Screenplay,” which has been applied since 2002, is deliberately broad and must be distinguished from previous designations of the category: “Screenplay based on material from another medium” (1957-1973), “Screenplay adapted from other material” (1974-1990), and “Screenplay based on material previously produced or published” (1991-2001), as these tended to invoke a number of problems, not least the unspoken agreement that an adaptation entails a change of media and does not, for example, include remakes (Leitch, “Adaptation and Intertextuality” 91). The current rule follows guidelines laid down by the Writers’ Guild of America (WGA), which distinguishes original from non-original screenplays and defines the latter as “screenplays based upon source material,” that is, material “previously published or exploited and upon which the writer’s work is to be based,” with research material being an exception—the guidelines mainly refer to novels and plays as illustrative examples (*Screen Credits Manual*). In order to determine screenplay credits, the Guild recommends that arbiters in credit arbitrations acknowledge “that a writer has access to prior literary material, an assumption based on the custom of the industry” (*Screen Credits Manual* 2). In its subsequent guidelines, the WGA outlines what degree of similarity has to exist between prior and later material and what kind of source material is to be acknowledged: research material is “not considered source material” (17), which allows for biopics (such as *Milk*, 2008) and fictionalized accounts of historical events (such as *The King’s Speech*, 2010) to compete in the Original Screenplay category at the Academy Awards. There are no specific guidelines given for when writers adapt their own material, though the WGA recommends keeping adaptation credits to a minimum, because of “the strong feeling against a multiplicity of credits” (22), which effectively works against the advertising of films as adaptations, and which

has sparked some controversy in the past: Nia Vardalos received a nomination in the Original Screenplay category, although her script for *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002) was based on her own stage show; and David Seidler's screenplay for *The King's Speech* had originally been envisioned by him for the theater, too, though it had only ever seen a public reading.

These examples show that the application of the terms "original" and "adapted" on behalf of the WGA and the AMPAS is, to some degree, arbitrary; and that the film industry relies on each category's individual reputation for containing films of certain distinct qualities. Whereas films running in the Original Screenplay category tend to be associated with stories about quirky underdogs and satirical takes on the *zeitgeist*—these films are also more frequently aimed at a younger audience—adapted scripts, on the other hand, carry the more solemn ring of the literary tradition and are more often correlated to the major prizes at the Academy Awards. According to Linda Hutcheon's estimate, 85 percent of the Academy Award for Best Picture winners—and 95 percent of all Emmy award-winning miniseries—are adaptations (4), the disdain frequently leveled at adaptations as "pale cop[ies] of the real thing" (Cartmell and Whelehan 3) notwithstanding.

On the surface, the dichotomy between original, independently spirited scripts on the one hand and stern history lessons or educational sagas on the other seems to hold up, as the Original Screenplay category has traditionally been associated with *auteurs* and, in recent years, independent productions with considerably lower budgets than big studio films. The list of recent winners includes Diablo Cody (*Juno*, 2007), Charlie Kaufman (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, 2004), and the Coen brothers (*Fargo*, 1996); the category's very own Hall of Fame reads like a who's who of *auteur* cinema in the second half of the twentieth century: the top spots in the list of writers with the most nominations are held by Allen (15 nominations as of 2013), Federico Fellini (6), and Ingmar Bergman and Mike Leigh (5 each). The Adaptation category, on the other hand, used to be the domain of cinematic history lessons (especially during the studio era), that is, films based on fictionalized accounts of historic legends (*A Man for All Seasons*, 1966; *The Lion in Winter*, 1968), or screen adaptations of canonical literary texts (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, 1962; *Tom Jones*, 1963). The seal of adaptation will lend a film prestige, as Murray argues in her analysis of the mutual dependence of the studio's award campaigns and the adaptation industry (168-74); and in some cases, it will even produce "star" adaptors like Ruth Praver Jhabvala, whose very name "functions as guarantor of adaptive fidelity and cultural quality" (Murray 147). In spite of the occasional exception to the rule,⁴ the two award categories can be thus distinguished, and one should be aware that a mere industrial convention is responsible for this state of affairs, that is, the question of what actually constitutes an adaptation will always be sidelined in favor of the rules of the market. *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, for example, was always more likely to compete in the Original Screenplay category, for the spirit of this unlikely box office hit was much more in line with the films associated with that category.⁵

Another paradigmatic example to challenge the arbitrary distinction between the Academy Awards' distinction between "Original" and "Adapted" is *Midnight in Paris*, a recent film by Allen, the director and screenwriter who has enjoyed a most

successful history in the Original Screenplay category although, ironically, he has only attended the ceremony once and never showed up to collect an award.⁶

The Unrecognized Adaptor: Woody Allen

Allen has only recently been discovered within adaptation studies (cf. the analyses by Stuchebrukhov or Metz), as his films do not really seem to carry the markers associated with award-friendly adaptations of the aforementioned kind. Tellingly, all of Allen's 15 Academy Award nominations as a writer have been in the Original Screenplay category, and only one of his films gives credit to a literary source: his 1972 portmanteau comedy, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex*, which is a satirical take on David Reuben's popular sex manual of the same name.⁷ The fact that Allen is rarely credited as an adaptor of other material, however, has not prevented critics from identifying some continuous key influences. In fact, there are a number of literary traditions and intertextual threads running through Allen's work, for instance the Chekhovian family constellations, or his on-going interest in the *Pygmalion* legend (Metz 85-88). In Allen's work, *Pygmalion* casts his shadow in

several forms, usually by reference to George Bernard Shaw's 1912 play. In *Melinda and Melinda* (2004), the character of Hobie (Will Ferrell), a struggling actor, includes Henry Higgins in his meager repertoire of classic roles, all of whom he plays with the same twist: "with a limp." The Shaw-like motif of an eloquent neurotic taking an intellectually inferior young woman under his wing frequently features in Allen's film (*Annie Hall*, 1977; *Manhattan*, 1979; *Whatever Works*, 2009) and is indebted to the same source; an intertextual love affair openly acknowledged in *Deconstructing Harry* (1997), when Fay (Elisabeth Shue) admits to the protagonist: "I was your pupil. It was Henry Higgins and Eliza Doolittle."



Naturally, not all of these intertextual connections really make adaptations out of Allen's films. Thomas Leitch has recently dedicated some insightful remarks to the nexus between adaptations and intertextual practice and has criticized the conflation between both: "If all texts are fluid, multiple, and indeterminate—that is, if every text is an intertext whose stability and integrity are social and political rather than ontological—then what are the differences between adaptations and the whole vast range of intertexts?" ("Adaptation and Intertextuality" 88). Leitch is certainly correct in pointing out that drawing on Gérard Genette's categories (which were never meant to be applied to adaptations) amounts to "building on a shaky foundation" ("Adaptation and Intertextuality" 96), and that Hutcheon's idea of looking at adaptations as distinctive instances of intertextuality will occasionally yield results that appear inconclusive and vague, and if one applies a rather narrow definition of adaptations as films that contain "a deliberate invitation [to the

audience] to read them as adaptations” (“Adaptation and Intertextuality” 94), then the majority of Allen’s films certainly do not represent adaptations.

However, the advantages of taking intertextuality into account should not be completely discarded: Genette’s category helps undermine the firm belief in originality that allows the screenwriting industry to perpetuate the opposition between Original and Adapted Screenplays, in spite of the common view shared by adaptation scholars that adaptation “is the norm, not the exception” (Hutcheon 176). Thus, an awareness of the many intertextual connections and hypertextual elements derived from the literary canon running through Allen’s work will help the viewer acknowledge the pastiche character of Allen’s films and, by implication, help deconstruct some of the romanticism surrounding the *auteur*, an ideology that continues to be favored by the AMPAS and their awards policy. To name but a few examples from the various scripts that have earned Allen Academy Award nominations: *Interiors* (1978) and *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986) have been read as contemporary updates of Chekhov’s *Three Sisters* (cf. Deltcheva); *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995) converts the tragedy of *Oedipus Rex* into “a comedy about how what we do not know will not hurt us” (Metz 84); *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989) and *Match Point* (2005) openly acknowledge the influence of the Dostoevskyan themes (and plot) of *Crime and Punishment* (cf. Stuchebrukhov), and *Match Point* has also been read as a variation of Patricia Highsmith’s novel, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (Bronfen 114-19). Similar cases could be made for a number of other Allen films, including his Kafka homage *Shadows and Fog* (1991), *Love and Death* (1975) with its various nods to the Great Russian novel, or the part-Shakespearean, part-Bergman *A Midsummer Night’s Sex Comedy* (1982).⁸

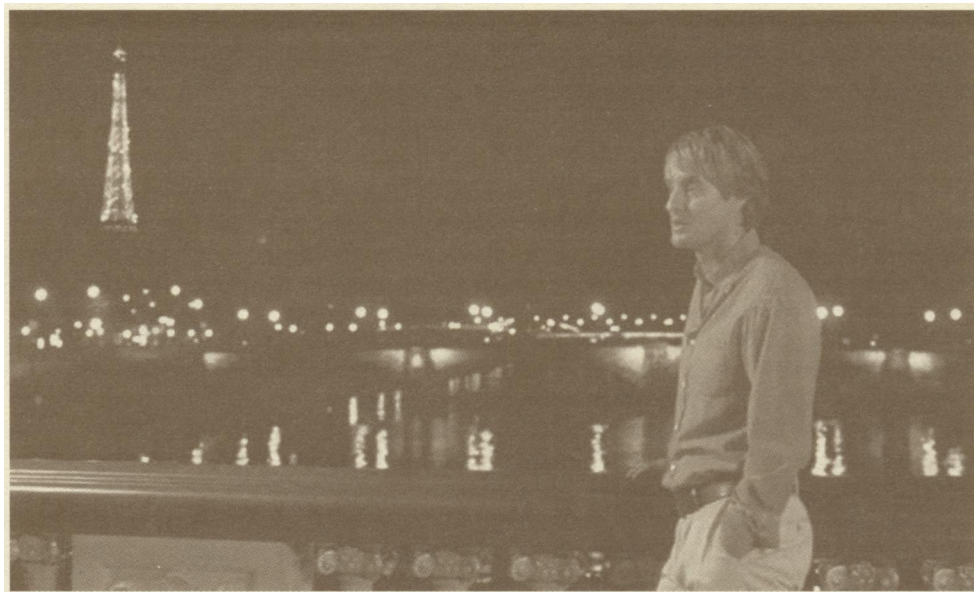
However, some of Allen’s films *can* be read as adaptations, even if one applies a narrower definition (i.e., one that goes beyond mere intertextual connections). Although the source material is never acknowledged in the credits, *Husbands and Wives* (1992) and *Deconstructing Harry* (1997), for example, are darkly comedic remakes of Ingmar Bergman films (1973’s *Scener ur ett äktenskap* and 1957’s *Smultonstrället*, respectively); both of them were nominated for Original Screenplay awards. An even stronger case is to be made for one of Allen’s more recent films, *Midnight in Paris*.

A Postcard from the Nostalgia Shop: *Midnight in Paris* (2011) and the Writing Conundrum

In 2012, Allen celebrated a comeback with a vengeance. Not only did his forty-fourth film, *Midnight in Paris*, steadily build into the director’s biggest box office hit to date (“It’s like he’s Michael Bay all of a sudden,” an amused Owen Wilson quips when interviewed in Robert Weide’s *Woody Allen: A Documentary*), the film was also widely received as proof that, in spite of some recent critical failures like *Cassandra’s Dream* (2007), the *auteur*’s “sublime gifts [were] still intact” (Nathan 46). Given the critical praise heaped upon the film, its commercial success, and Allen’s reputation as one of America’s most enduring and original filmmakers, it was perhaps inevitable that *Midnight in Paris* would win an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay, Allen’s third win in this category.

However, the classification of *Midnight in Paris*’s script as original (in the sense of “non-adaptation”) is problematical and shows a degree of inconsistency on

behalf of the Academy, similar to the case of Vardalos and her adaptation of her stage show. Apparently, the case of screenwriters adapting their own material will occasionally prove a blind spot to the Academy voters; even more so since the rebranding of the category occurred in 2002.

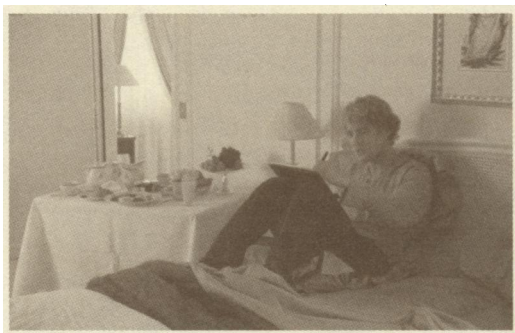


Midnight in Paris constitutes much more than an example of mere “intertextual practice” (Leitch, “Adaptation and Intertextuality” 100), for Allen has arguably adapted the plot of the film and a number of its jokes from his own past work in different media. His 1965 stand-up routine, “The Lost Generation” (included on the audio compilation, *Standup Comic*), sees him reminisce about his fictitious past in Europe, alongside Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, and F. Scott Fitzgerald (who plagiarizes a Dickens novel). Allen would later adapt the very same theme and some of the jokes in his short story, “A Twenties Memory” (1971). The homodiegetic narrator regularly has his nose broken by fellow author Ernest Hemingway and resides in a villa in southern France with Alice B. Toklas and Pablo Picasso. Like the character of Gil Pender in *Midnight in Paris*, he tries his hand at the Great American Novel (struggling with the fact that “the print was too small and I couldn’t get through it,” [Allen, *The Complete Prose* 233]), and submits his work to Gertrude Stein, “and I remember once asking her if she thought I should become a writer. In the typically cryptic way we were all so enchanted with, she said, ‘No’” (233). The pantheon assembled in *Midnight in Paris* is already gathered here: Picasso quarrels with Stein over aesthetics (234), Man Ray and



Salvador Dalí appear as dinner companions (235), Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald return home from their New Year's Eve Party—in April (235), and the narrator dedicates a book of poems to Alice Toklas, “even though they were T. S. Eliot's” (236). Forty years later, *Midnight in Paris* readdresses the major theme of that story—to get up close to cultural icons of the 1920s and to poke fun at their idolization—and reworks it into a complex interrogation of the mechanisms of nostalgia. To say that the film is an adaptation is neither to disavow its quality nor to diminish the charm of the basic concept and its wit. But the decision to honor *Midnight in Paris* in the Original Screenplay category not only shows the Academy's inconsistency (for it *has* occasionally been known to award prizes to screenwriters adapting their own novels or plays in the past⁹), but also suggests that the AMPAS struggles to break a habit and to include a well-known *auteur* in the adaptation category, a step that might problematize the straight-forward distinction between original and adapted scripts and also call the predominant image of both into question.

Moreover, *Midnight in Paris* is a far too clever twist on the notion of originality and also cracks far too many jokes at the expense of the Hollywood screenwriting industry to consider its triumph at the 84th Academy Awards an accidental by-product of Allen revisiting his old work. Like many of Allen's protagonists before him, Gil Pender (Owen Wilson) in *Midnight in Paris* is a writer who, by his own account, “failed freshman English” yet ended up a successful “Hollywood hack who never gave actual literature a real shot, ... grinding out movie scripts” instead. If Murray's basic definition of the Hollywood screenwriter as the



nodal point through whom “all adaptation industry traffic necessarily passes” (133f.) holds true, then Gil Pender is a road casualty: disillusioned, depressed, and burned out. Though his fiancée, Inez (Rachel McAdams), warns him that he is “in love with a fantasy,” Gil travels to Paris, a city with whose magical reputation as a cultural hotspot he is infatuated (“Let's get some culture,” he announces emphatically before going to the museum). His journey to Paris, where, during a midnight stroll,

Gil miraculously travels back in time and meets cultural icons such as Cole Porter, Dalí, or the Fitzgeralds, allows Allen to present a double-layered interrogation of nostalgia, in a year where many of the films contending for the major awards dealt with exactly that topic (including Martin Scorsese's *Hugo* and Michel Hazanavicius's *The Artist*). However, unlike those films, whose plots and *mise-en-scène* structures pay undiluted homage to chapters of

film history (the early years of cinema and the silent-movie era, respectively), Allen's film is brimming with irony, presenting nostalgia as a kind of *mise-en-abyme* quite similar to the structure of *différance* (Derrida) that we find at the heart of originality discourse: something constantly deferred, always folding back in on the vain search for an original center of meaning, in spite of the irreducible distance from the performative gesture ("the most 'event-like' statement possible," Derrida 105).

Whereas Gil is obsessed with the 1920s, the characters from that decade would like to live during the Belle Époque, and the painters of this period, in turn, idealize the Renaissance. Evidently, *Midnight in Paris* not only pokes fun at the disputable myth of Paris as the original birthplace of modernism, but the film is also a continuation of the ongoing motif of postmodern nostalgia, which Britta Feyerabend identifies as a key theme in Allen's work: Gil (who considers himself "born too late") and other Allen heroes like *Manhattan's* Isaac Davis "never truly live in the present and, instead, always carry some 'burden' of the past around with them" (22). In addition, *Midnight in Paris* is a highly self-reflexive film that quotes motifs dating back to Allen's very first appearance on screen.¹⁰

In spite of the numerous intertextual connections with other Allen films, it is *Manhattan* that *Midnight in Paris* resembles like a virtual carbon (or, rather, color) copy at times. This applies to its plot structure, *mise-en-scène*, and character constellation alike: both films are infatuated with mythical cities, and both open with montages



of city landmarks set to a memorable jazz score (the first bars of Sidney Bechet's *Si tu vois ma mère* in *Midnight in Paris* are even evocative of the sliding clarinet solo of *Rhapsody in Blue* that opens *Manhattan*), both see the protagonist torn between three contrastive female characters (the destructive, castrating ex-wife and fiancée, respectively; a soul-mate with whom there is no realistic future; and a younger, naive version of femininity for whom the protagonist eventually settles), and both depict him in contrast to a despicable antagonist dispersing pseudo-intellectual witticisms. Thus, *Midnight in Paris* demonstrates that Allen has not only gained another career boost from his European period (following diminishing box-office returns in the US), but that the director who had hardly ever set foot outside New York is

now almost considered an expatriate American (though, unlike Stanley Kubrick, he has never taken permanent residence in Europe), and not just an able adaptor but also an adaptable filmmaker who took to the streets of Paris and London as naturally as to those of New York. Since 2005, Allen has been revisiting his earlier films and effectively remade some of them in picturesque European locations. Hence the indisputable likeness of *Match Point* (and *Cassandra's Dream*) to *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, hence the gathering of familiar motifs and story-lines in *To Rome with Love* (2012), some of which go as far back as *Annie Hall* (a film that Allen had already remade into the largely overlooked, post-9/11 *Anything Else*, 2003). This tendency toward self-referentiality was also emphasized by Allen's cameo appearance in Sophie Lellouche's *Paris-Manhattan* (2012), itself a remake of the Allen-scripted comedy, *Play It Again, Sam* (1972), with Allen now acting the part that he himself had assigned to the legend of Humphrey Bogart: a cult figure in popular culture.

With *Midnight in Paris*, Allen adds a meta-textual dimension to the self-referential tone, since both *Manhattan* and *Midnight in Paris* portray their main characters struggling between their jobs in light entertainment and their wish to fulfill more ambitious literary projects. Unlike *Manhattan*, however, the satirical thread in *Midnight in Paris* is directly linked to the Hollywood industry, even though Gil's profession as a screenwriter does not feature prominently in the course of the plot. The viewer learns that Gil's literary project tells the story of "a man who works in a nostalgia shop. . . . A place where they sell old things, memorabilia. Does that sound terrible?" In the course of the film, Gertrude Stein (played by Kathy Bates) offers feedback on the book, and it is through her reading that the viewer is allowed an impression of Gil's



prose: "*Out of the Past* was the name of the store, and its products consisted of memories. What was prosaic and even vulgar to one generation had been transmuted by the mere passing of years to a status at once magical and also camp."

It is not just the title of the fictitious shop—which happens to be the name of Jacques Tourneur's 1947 *film noir*, a classic studio-era picture (remade in 1984)—that clearly signals to the audience that Gil's nostalgia business is a metaphor for the Hollywood film industry, where the selling of memories and the transformation and renegotiation of cultural signifiers is the daily bread of writers and directors alike. Given Gil's inferiority complex about being just "a Hollywood hired hand" who "wouldn't call [his] babbling poetic" and the tendency of Allen's protagonists to fictionalize their private conundrums (cases in point: *Annie Hall*'s Alvy Singer, who rewrites his unhappy relationship in a stage-play; *Manhattan*'s Isaac Davis, who dedicates a short story named "The Castrating Zionist" to his mother; or *Deconstructing Harry*'s eponymous character, who pays dearly for putting friends and relatives into his novels), the nostalgia shop can be read as an allegory of the dream factory that specializes in putting well-known

stories into new shapes, and that relies on tested formulas. Thus, *Midnight in Paris* may represent one of Allen's greatest coups, as the *auteur* manages to get away not only with an adaptation, but with a film that attacks the Hollywood idea of originality—only to win America's most prestigious award in a category that rewards the virtue of originality. When Gil's prospective mother-in-law recounts “a wonderfully funny American film” she has seen, yet fails to name any of the cast members, Gil dryly comments: “Wonderful but forgettable. That sounds like a picture I've seen. I wrote it!” This remark, made in passing, may very well contain the key to an interpretation of *Midnight in Paris* as a critique of Hollywood's undetected adaptations, for Allen's multi-layered screenplay demonstrates that originality is but a commodity sold to a rather forgetful audience.



By commenting sarcastically on Hollywood practice, the film continues another key theme to be found in Allen's *oeuvre*: his well-known disdain for the Californian film industry, most openly articulated in *Stardust Memories* (1980) and *Hollywood Ending* (2002). The latter not only riffs on the making of the American studio picture and portrays Hollywood executives as dishonorable suits who mispronounce the word *auteur*, but it is also executed in the OTT fashion of a Hollywood epic¹¹ and was to prove strangely prophetic of its own reception.¹² But although Allen's characters usually favor the classics of the Hollywood studio era to the more contemporary offerings from Hollywood¹³ and seek solace in European cinema (like the films of Ingmar Bergman or Federico Fellini), Allen bestows his satirical critique on both sides of the Atlantic. The viewer learns that any superficial distinction between “imitative Hollywood” on the one hand and “creative, original Europe” on the other must be taken with a grain of salt: In *Hollywood Ending*, the French film critics are the only ones to discover artistic merit in a film literally directed by a blind man (“Here I'm a bum, but there a genius. Thank God the French exist!”); and in *Midnight in Paris*, Gil



meets surrealist *auteur* Luis Buñuel and hands him the idea for his film *El ángel exterminador* (1962). The scene is but a brief one and its joke formula is a staple of the time-travel genre: Mark Twain had his *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) astonish the medieval crowd with gunpowder and bicycles, whereas Michael J. Fox “invented” Rock and Roll in *Back to the Future* (1985). Yet the Buñuel scene is crucial to understanding

Midnight in Paris's subtext on originality and adaptation—the film suggests that even allegedly creative and original minds who will later be acknowledged to have made a mark on their era depend on input from other sources.

On the surface, his films may be brimming with nostalgia for better films and classical novels, but Allen is usually careful to point out that his flawed yet likable protagonists, like the movie industry itself, do not cherish artistic treasures for their own sake—adaptation always entails an agenda. In *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, Cliff (Woody Allen) admits that he has borrowed from James Joyce to write a love letter (“You probably wondered why all the references to Dublin.”), and a similar case could be made for Allen’s love letter to Paris, at the end of which Gil learns to emancipate himself both from the Hollywood machinery he is caught up in and his nostalgic bouts. By awarding Allen their most renowned prize, the Academy may have inadvertently admitted that its very own distinction between Original and Adapted scripts merely amounts to a flexible legal convention, and that originality, too, is but a persistent myth, one dreamt up by Hollywood’s inventive adaptation factory.

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Notes

¹ The Golden Globe Awards or the film festivals in Cannes and Venice do not distinguish between the two and just give out an award for the “Best Screenplay.” The British Film and Television Awards show switched from the Best Screenplay category to the dualism of original and adapted scripts in 1984.

² According to the website of the Academy Awards, the Oscar statuette stands on a reel of film featuring five spokes, “signifying the five original branches of the Academy,” i.e., actors, directors, producers, technicians, writers (“The Oscar Statuette”).

³ *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934), *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (Milos Forman, 1975), *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991).

⁴ There are, for example, films that exhibit all the characteristics of adaptations (Leitch, “Adaptation, the Genre” 111-14), including period setting and a conflation of fact and fiction, but which were, in fact, filmed from original screenplays (e.g., *Dead Poets Society*, 1989; *Gosford Park*, 2001; *The King’s Speech*, 2010).

⁵ Had *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* been entered for the competition in the Adapted Screenplay category, it would have been up against Roman Polanski’s Holocaust drama, *The Pianist*, and the adaptation of Michael Cunningham’s novel, *The Hours*—but, ironically, also against Charlie Kaufman’s script for *Adaptation*, another film to poke fun at the mechanisms of the screenwriting industry and to question the status of adaptation itself.

⁶ Allen only appeared during the 2002 Oscar show, to invite fellow filmmakers to continue making films in New York, following the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

⁷ *Bananas* (1971) is based in parts on Richard P. Powell’s novel, *Don Quixote, U.S.A.* (1966), though the source is not mentioned in the credits.

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⁸ See Susan Arpajian Jolley's detailed account of the Shakespearean reference points in Woody Allen's work.

⁹ To name but a few examples, this holds true for the author of *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), Pierre Boule (though Boule was allegedly only credited as the author of the script because the actual writers had been blacklisted); Peter Shaffer, who adapted his own play, *Amadeus* (1984); and John Irving, who won an Academy Award for adapting his novel, *The Cider House Rules* (1999).

¹⁰ The scene where Zelda Fitzgerald contemplates suicide at the bank of the Seine mirrors a sequence in *What's New Pussycat?* (Clive Donner), a 1965 sex farce written by Allen and featuring him in a supporting role. In *Pussycat*, Allen's character has dinner at the river bank when Dr. Fassbender (Peter Sellers) tries to drown himself in the river. Allen used the same scenery for the dance finale of *Everyone Says I Love You* (1996).

¹¹ *Hollywood Ending* is one of Allen's longest films and features several tropes of the classic American studio picture, including a reconciliation between an estranged father-son couple and an unlikely happy ending.

¹² The ending of the film sees Val Waxman's (Woody Allen) disastrous film open to horrible reviews and turn into box-office poison in the US, before the French critics discover their love for it. In fact, *Hollywood Ending* was a commercial flop in the United States, but opened the film festival in Cannes.

¹³ In this respect, the casting of Owen Wilson in *Midnight in Paris*'s leading role is ironic. Though Wilson made his break in independent films, co-scripting a number of projects with director Wes Anderson, he would carve a name for himself with exactly the kind of sequel fodder that his character mocks in Allen's film, i.e., action films with Jackie Chan, and box-office smashes such as *Meet the Parents* (2000), *Night at the Museum* (2006) and *Cars* (2006), plus their respective sequels.

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