

Deconstructing Harry

Woody Allen, after several films in which he is not the principal, moves back to the fore in *Deconstructing Harry*. As writer Harry Block, he is a harassed man of sixty who “can’t function in life but ... only function in art.” He’s been through six shrinks, three wives, and admits “I still like whores.” He can’t keep one organ from flapping in his mouth, and he can’t keep another in his pants. He drops his wives (among them Kirstie Alley and Judy Davis) on amorous whims and tries to win a winsome thing (Elizabeth Shue) less than half his age.

Does this sound terribly familiar? This fictional Harry is so close to the public Woody that the staunchest Allen adherents will probably love this guy. Avid fans who have followed his much publicized life will delight in “deconstructing” Woody to find parallels between the man and his persona as Harry.

Surely, Woody Allen has worked pieces of his character into his creations before; indeed, some of these fictive elements have become inseparable from his reality. The problem with *Deconstructing Harry* for me is that this time--and this comes from a long-time Allen fan--the parallels seem so patent as to make me uncomfortable.

After setting up his character, rife with cruelties and infidelities as revealed in his personal life and in snatches from his writings, Allen offers an on-the-road segment, wherein he rounds up any friends and family he can find to accompany him to a ceremony honoring his writing at an upstate university. The meandering road trip is also intercut with bits from his past and his prose, all constituting the “de-construction” of the Block psyche. The trouble is...one doesn’t care all that much about this whining, self-centered nerd, at least not this time. And worse, he just isn’t very funny.

Once upon a time, Allen may have been just as self-referential, yet in *Manhattan* (1979) he made a fresh and winning masterpiece out of his own neuroses. Almost 20 years later and working over the same material, it is sad to say, Woody has become so ingrown, so self-absorbed, that he has become somewhat embarrassing to watch.

(“Deconstructing Harry” is rated “R” for rough language, surprising for an Allen film.)

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