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### The Satire Behind Deconstructing Harry

The film *Deconstructing Harry*, written & directed by Woody Allen, tells the story of Harry Block, a famous New York City author. While our protagonist has a successful career as a writer, his personal life is a disaster. He is divorced and has a son, but his ex-wife rarely lets him see him. He has many failed relationships and many angry ex-girlfriends to go with them. He is lonely and alienated from most of the people in his life because his books usually feature these people as characters, but not in a good way, for example, in Harry's latest book *Leslie*, based on Harry's ex-girlfriend Lucy, is having an affair with her sister's husband, Ken, based on Harry. The main plot of the movie follows Harry on a trip to the university he was once kicked out of, to receive an honorary degree. The film starts off with Lucy going to Harry's apartment, where she then threatens to kill herself. Harry convinces her not to do it, she then tries to kill Harry. The movie then cuts to Harry's therapy session, where he discusses the honoring ceremony at his old university, and how he is disheartened that he has no one to join him. Since he has no one to go with him to accept the honor, Harry decides to bring Cookie, a prostitute he recently hired for some "company". His old friend Richard, as a last minute decision, also joins them. Exposing the issues of self-victimizing and shifting the blame, Allen uses mockery, exaggeration and the attack of character type, creating a satire that skewers the notion of the victim.

Harry constantly exaggerates the world around him, skewing the perspective of the

audience, presenting his lifestyle as lavish, and too good to be true. This is made evident by the fact that his only income is from his books being sold, and as such, the notion of living luxuriously isn't feasible. The audience is fooled, in a sense, into believing that Harry's ideal world is the real world in which he resides. However, Harry does live in such a world, so-to-speak, but he exists mentally within it, not actually. Throughout the movie, it is made apparent that Harry's mental state is deteriorating. When Harry and Cookie are at the carnival, with the help of a marijuana contact-high, it is made evident how bad the deterioration truly is. This is when Harry's character from his latest book, Ken, appears; he forces Harry to confront some painful truths about his life, like how he only hooked up with Jane, Lucy's sister, because he knew it wouldn't work out, so he'd never have to, as Ken put it, "give up sport-fucking and chronic dissatisfaction and grow up." This subconscious reasoning is a huge part of why Harry's relationships always fall apart.

In all of Harry's relationships that we see in the film, he warns the women he's involved with that he is not trustworthy and he isn't good for them. Yet, when the relationships eventually fall apart, they blame all the issues on Harry and resent him, despite the fact that he warned them. The ignorance of those women plays into their role as the Fool, as they victimize themselves and make Harry out to be some kind of monster, even though Harry explicitly gives them plenty of reasons not to date him. This is a common event through the narration. The Adulterer is obviously represented by Harry. Allen attacks the Adulterer by showing how self-centered they are, the little regard they have for others, and, consequently, how their misdeeds may later bring them harm. Using these two character types, Allen highlights the absurdity of both in the first scene. Lucy takes a taxi to Harry's apartment, and, filled with anger after seeing

Harry's latest book, threatens to kill herself with a gun she pulls out of her purse. Harry convinces her not to kill herself, but still filled with rage, she tries to kill Harry. He distracts her by telling her a story, based on his youth, that he is currently writing: A sex-obsessed young man named Harvey who is mistakenly claimed by Death. Harry manages to calm Lucy down, which shows that even though she was filled with rage, she fell for Harry's charm. Harry manages to save himself by telling a story on the subject that is the cause of why he betrayed her.

In the film, Harry is depicted as being scummy, immature, insecure, and annoying. Woody Allen wrote Harry like this, as a way of projecting how Allen's harshest critics view and demonize the writer. In doing so, Allen presents the film's viewer with the perspective of an extremist. The idea of Allen projecting his own personality onto his character, Harry, is extremely meta. The reason it is so meta is that Allen's character, Harry, is an author who also projects *himself* onto *his* characters. Both Allen and Harry have had their personal lives affected by their works and vice versa. With these similarities, the presence of Harry in the film is Allen's way of mocking himself and his critics.

Harry shifts the blame when the women from his relationships blame him for all the trouble he caused them. Harry says that it's their fault for dating him, as he told them not to. When the movie is over, it's obvious that Allen is exposing those who whine, and play the victim. He shows it can lead to a sort of feedback loop, where everyone is the victim and the cause. This provokes the question: "If everyone is the cause, and also the victim, is anyone really the victim?" Allen is saying in his satire, no one is truly the victim. My reasoning is that, if everyone can be the cause and the victim of a situation, the events leading to the said situation were caused by the individual. The entropy of that person's decisions has created a hair-trigger for disaster,

ready to snap from the slightest issue. In the case of Deconstructing Harry, between Harry's flagrant debauchery and irresponsibility, and the self-defeating and self-righteous behaviors of the women in his life, it was inevitable for problems to arise. As long as everyone claims to be a victim, the situation will only worsen; pointing fingers will just involve others getting hurt.

Allen's satire is saying, the only way to end the cycle is for someone to be the bigger person, take responsibility, and stop being the victim.